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**‘PLAYING THE BALL’: CONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY
AND MASCULINE IDENTITY IN RUGBY:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE TWO CODES OF LEAGUE AND
UNION AND THE PEOPLE INVOLVED**

KARL SPRACKLEN

A thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements of Leeds
Metropolitan University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

This research programme was carried out in collaboration with the
Rugby Football League
and the British Amateur Rugby League Association

July 1996

For Rachel, who believed in it but never saw it

Rugby League: A Man's game For All The Family

Official RFL advertising slogan of the early eighties

Abstract

‘Playing the ball’: Constructing Community and Masculine Identity in Rugby: An Analysis of the Two Codes of League and Union and the People Involved

This thesis explores and examines the construction of a sense of community and masculine identity in the sport of rugby league. I pose the question of how the game constructs these identities, then the thesis proceeds to synthesise a working theoretical framework which draws upon ideas of the cultural production of class, community, history and gender to provide a focus for the research. I develop the way rugby league becomes an imaginary community, ‘the game’, and how this sense of community defines the ideas of masculinity and northern-ness, and creates both belonging and exclusion. My theoretical framework develops new ideas about how community is created, and how hegemonic masculinity is produced and maintained in sport.

The thesis is situated in a particular research paradigm, the naturalist paradigm, which best serves the aim of exploring the field and developing theory through a grounded theoretical approach. This informs both the synthesis and development of theory around the concept of exploring the field, and suggests a particular methodology.

This thesis is based on qualitative research I undertook in a field consisting of a number of rugby league clubs in a district I called Sudthorpe. In addition, I did fieldwork at a rugby union club and a women’s rugby league club so that the theoretical concepts I developed could be expanded and explored further. This qualitative fieldwork was flexible

enough to allow me to explore the social networks that extended outside Sudthorpe, and I used both ethnography and semi-structured interviews. In addition, I reviewed emic literature, secondary sources, and consulted archives and experts. Coupled with a literature review, reflexivity and grounded theory, my research was triangulated by a multimethod approach that allowed for a synthesis of ideas. This synthesis of symbolic community and masculine identity in rugby provide the original ideas of the thesis.

Note on Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used in the thesis:

ARL - The Australian Rugby League

ARLFC - Amateur Rugby League Football Club

BARLA - The British Amateur Rugby League Association

BBC - The British Broadcasting Corporation

JRFU - The Japanese Rugby Football Union

NSWRFU - The New South Wales Rugby Football Union

NSWRL - The New South Wales Rugby League

NU - The Northern Union

RFC - Rugby Football Club

RFL - The Rugby Football League

RFU - The Rugby Football Union

RL - Rugby League

RLFC - Rugby League Football Club

RLSA - Rugby League Supporters' Association

RU - Rugby Union

RUFC - Rugby Union Football Club

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Preface

'I am not dependent on any one author, but on countless faithful witnesses who either know or remember the facts, apart from what I know myself... should the reader discover any inaccuracies in what I have written, I humbly beg that he will not impute them to me, because, as a true history of law requires, I have laboured honestly to transmit whatever I could ascertain from common report for the instruction of posterity.'

Bede (731:1990, p. 43)

When I started this thesis little did I know how much it would change, and in doing so, how much I would change with it. The idea for the project was initially nebulous, informed by my own experiences. Later, as I taught myself to explore (for me) novel theories, I realised there was redemption to be had in expanding one's knowledge through a research process. When I felt like quitting (which I did on a number of occasions), or when the realities of ethnography caught up with me - such as drinking too much beer with those far better qualified than I and forgetting everything that happened the morning after - I pulled myself back to the straight and narrow through my insatiable desire to know more.

Coupled with this stubborn arrogance was a way of viewing knowledge I had picked up in my first degree. Those who have known me for a long time may still wonder if there is any connection between alchemy and rugby league, but for me both fields of research used similar tools and developed similar ideas about the construction of knowledge. I am in debt, therefore, to the incoherent and uninspiring academics who put me off hard science and to Dr. Richard Jennings for showing me the way out. In my time as a sociologist/historian of science I found sanctuary in Wittgenstein, Harry Collins, Foucault and Bruno Latour - for opening my eyes to the way all knowledge is produced thanks must go to Simon Schaffer

and Richard Ashcroft, as well as Jocasta. By the time I applied to do a PhD I was far down the qualitative, naturalistic line.

In the past three years I have had help on an academic level in grappling with methodology, community and masculinity. There are too many names to mention. Thanks must go to all the academics at Leeds and those at conferences who have stopped to offer me advice, or read drafts of my work, or who have accepted papers. Of special help have been other postgraduates, both at Leeds Metropolitan and in other institutions, but especially those in the School: Ben Carrington, Hayley Fitzgerald, Peter Messent and Beccy Watson, all of whom have had to put up with me hogging the computer and holding forthright opinions. Thanks must also go to my supervisors, without whom none of this would have been possible - Jonathan Long, Peter Bramham and George McKinney - as well as family and friends who have suffered my obsession without too much complaint.

Finally a big 'thank you' must go to all the gatekeepers, contacts, respondents and people out there in the field who not only allowed me to use their valuable time, but helped me understand what was going on. If there are any inaccuracies in what I have written, the responsibility is mine, and like Bede I can only humbly ask for forgiveness, for I have laboured honestly to transmit their story.

Karl Spracklen

Leeds, 5 July 1996

Introduction

Chapter One

Defining a problem: an introduction

'The River Hull might not have a name like the Rio Grande as a legendary border, but it splits the city in two and no twain e'er meets. Now I was West Hull born and bred, and black-and-white all the way through. This now presented me with a problem because there was only one place in Cottingham, where I lived, to buy records - and the map, as well as my sense of direction, said Cottingham was safely to the west of the river. But the fine emporium in question was called East Hull Radio and Records. This caused me great consternation: could I possibly patronise a shop with that title? What was it doing over our side anyway? What if my hard-earned money was being secretly channelled into the red-and-white slush fund? I never did get over the uncomfortable suspicion that the establishment was a secret front for Rovers.'

(Gibbons, 1994: p. 164)

In the dim light of the inferior arc lamps around the pitch I could just make out, through the mist, dark and ferocious giants running and grunting and passing between them a grey ball. My hands, warmed by a portion of chips, were still too cold to clap, so I cheered with every cheer that went up. I knew who I was supporting: it was my dad's team, our team, the one whose scarf and bobble hat adorned my body. But the game itself was out of the understanding of a five year old. We were playing our rivals from the other side of town, the team my dad cursed and swore at whenever they were mentioned in the paper. So I, naturally, felt the same way about them. Yet I cheered with every cheer, unaware that most of the cheers were for the other team, until my older brother punched me.

Then, from out of the mist, a player leaner and smaller than the others appeared, running right past where I stood with the ball in his hands. I looked at him and recognised him as one of my players. He had a number five on his back, and his jersey was clean enough to be distinguishable from the others, but it was his face I knew. He was my hero, he stood out from the rest of the players, who were all granite faced and sideburned. He was a player even a five year old with limited attention spans could recognise.

He was black, but at the time I didn't understand what that meant. All I knew was he scored tries, and I always wanted to be him whenever we played. I remember seeing the sweat on his face, the spittle at the edges of his mouth, and the draught of Wintergreen and damp grass as he went by. I remember the cry that went up from my dad and brother as he touched down, unopposed, though I was too small to see. I couldn't understand the jubilation on the faces of the adults who were stood around me, but I cheered and shouted his name anyway. Then my team's name was being chanted, and I imagined that I was my hero, waving at my fans, and I felt I belonged there. When the hooter went my dad told me we had won - and what's more, we had beaten *them*.

I was back from university for Christmas. Instead of driving home my brother took me straight to a cup tie we were playing, with all my bags on the backseat. I was tired after the long journey and the long night before, but we knew there were more important things than driving safely and relaxing at home. We were in the 3rd round of the Regal Trophy! With minutes to go we paid our way in, grabbed a quick pint, then rushed out to watch the match. We collapsed into our seats in the stand, exhausted, then the ref blew his whistle and the adrenaline rushed back. Familiar faces were all around me, people who I'd grown up with for eighty minutes each Sunday. The same voices began to moan as we went behind.

Our tactics were the same, our defence as weak as ever, and their fans were loud and aggressive. A small section called our winger names whenever he touched the ball, simply because he was black. In response some of our lads called them sheep-shaggers and radioactive mutants (it was a Cumbrian team). We were losing by a wide margin, and I was gutted. I hated their fans for their jeers and racist taunts - I knew they were all the same, backwoods Cumbrians, and our lads were right. They were all inbred and mutated by pollution from Sellafield: especially the players, who were all dirty and thick and over rated.

When we finally scored, thanks to the efforts of a youngster born and bred in our district, I knew he was doing this to tell those Cumbrians where to go. We all cheered, and chanted his name and the name of our team. We knew we were losing, but we were better men. In front of me an old man who looked like an ex-player, and who whined at the top of his voice at every refereeing decision that went against us, shouted towards the dug out: "Get more of our own on!". He turned to his companion, and I heard him say: "It teks pride to play eighty minutes, only a local feller knows what it means to play fer us."

At the time, I knew exactly what he meant. It made perfect sense to me. I had watched our team through thin and thinner - we never seemed to have any thick - and I had never really paused to accept that people could have any other sort of loyalty during a match. Of course, away from the game I was as fair minded as the next person, but during the game itself, when we were inevitably losing to some smug team full of ex-Internationals and Australians, I never paused to explore the paradoxes and tacit meanings of my support. So I could empathise with the old man's comments, even though I couldn't sympathise with or justify them.

East Dereham, Norfolk. I was playing my first game of rugby for the town team I'd joined at university. The league was a small, badly organised amateur league that existed only a few years. We were the Cambridge Eagles *ne* Tigers, a club run by one dedicated rugby league fan originally from Keighley who lectured at the town's sixth form college, and we consisted of a couple of students, some locals, and an Australian computer programmer. The bulk of our squad were squaddies, including our scrum half, a lad from Wigan called Shaun.

I'd driven to the match with the Australian computer programmer and our coach/manager/secretary. On the way I'd felt sick, so I listened to their complaints about union bias, uncaring administrators and journalists involved in rugby league up north, and the lack of proper (i.e. Australian) training methods in the Eastern Counties League. I wondered about the last complaint, as these two were the people who organised our weekly games of touch'n'pass.

On the pitch. The team we were playing were based at a village rugby union club, and some of its members turned out for us when one of our cars went missing with four squaddies. It was the first time I'd seen the free gangway work so smoothly. When the match started the ball came my way but it was caught by someone else. The pace quickened and all of a sudden I had the ball in my hands and I was flattened.

My head cracked the ground, arms forced the wind from my lungs and dug into my stomach. Before I knew it I was back up, dragged to my feet by the shouting from the rest of my team. I played the ball then glanced casually at a huge graze on my knee, pretending that I wasn't concerned, then I heard the referee's whistle.

I looked up. The Australian computer programmer was on the ground, his face twisted in agony, though he was holding back his tears. Players from both sides were staring

at him, and the manager ran on. I walked over to see what was happening, and saw his foot dangling at an unnatural angle from his ankle, where the ligaments and bone had sheared.

This was the game I watched, the game I played.

In a pub in the springtime, I was wondering idly what to do after I had finished my degree. Stay on? Find work? Like most students I was clueless. The prospect of finding a job was frightening, viewed from the comfort of a nice Saturday afternoon in the presence of like minded people and a pint of Tanglefoot. I knew I was good enough to go on to do a postgraduate degree, and I felt it had to be research of some kind. We were discussing this among ourselves, making jokes and trying to guess our futures. I was sitting there with an Australian rugby league jersey on, and a friend pointed at it.

“Why don’t you do a PhD on rugby?” he joked, knowing it was a topic on which I’d spoken at length.

I think I made a joke back. The Tanglefoot wasn’t a good aid to memory. But I remembered his comment, as I remembered the agony on the Australian lad’s face, and my first feeling of exhilaration as a child, and the strange anger and pride at the cup clash. Why did the old man think like he did about local players? Why did I associate with my team? And why did people play a game where with only two tackles made a player’s playing career was ended? This thesis grew out of my own doubts and questions about my own experience.

Inevitably, any research project involves a process of self realisation, an exploration of the researcher, as well as the researched (Bourdieu, 1990; Ely, 1991; Whyte, 1993). On the one hand, I am inextricably bound to the culture of rugby league, and the people and

places associated with it. I grew up looking at maps of the country, seeing the string of otherwise anonymous towns across the north of England where professional rugby league was played. To grow up knowing rugby league is to know that Hull is a divided city, that the Gallant Youths are Batley, that pies are synonymous with Wigan, and that the only Town worth talking about is Workington. For me the centre of the world was a district of a northern city I did not even live in. But that was where my dad looked to, and hence where as a youngster I owed my loyalty. It never entered my head that it could be anything else, and although there were people at school who liked *them*, or football, or even no sport at all, rugby league was part of the fabric of our lives. We played it, we talked about it, we were taught by a top grade referee. For the first fifteen years of my life it was as natural as the sky, as familiar as the view from my bedroom window.

But although I belong to this district, and to this game, I have grown beyond it. I found out there were other things in life besides rugby league, and as my horizons changed so did my expectations and values. While people I knew from school joined the army, played for Bradford Northern and got married, I went to FE college and discovered music and education. This distancing from rugby league and the north continued, when I went to a prestigious university where the most important sport was rowing and very few people had heard of rugby league, except perhaps as a quaint northern diversion from “real rugby”. It was this rugby that I played when playing for the college. It was this I discussed, and it was this culture I was exposed to.

I would be a fool to suggest I did not change. How I see the world, how I behave, and the opinions that I hold are alien to the culture I grew up in. The very way I speak marks me out as different. This tension between my district, my team, and the education I received, is both a weakness and a strength. I can no longer watch rugby league without

thinking about the damage it can cause, and the social divisions it highlights. But I can use what I have learnt to explore this game, to get inside and understand what it means to the people involved: the players, the administrators, the supporters. Once inside, however, I can translate what I see and understand into the academic world I move in. Similarly, my familiarity with rugby union and middle-class culture has provided the lever to enter a union club in a comparative study.

That is what I have set out to achieve in this thesis. As the research evolved, so my own life has evolved, changing with my understanding of what the game means to people, how those people relate to their environment, and the connections they make. Obviously, this exploration of meaning and identity has also been about myself, about my role as a white male, of working-class origin with a middle class education and profession. This process of exploration has not been painless - yet it has been worthwhile.

Understanding the problematic

'Rugby league was a game whose laws had been codified by workers in the forlorn north of England; miners and millworkers of Bradford and Wigan, Hull and Warrington, were invaded by that particular genius which concerns itself with the serious business of human games, and produced what was... the supreme code, a cellular structure composed of thirteen players which mimicked art and war so exactly it became them.'

(Kenneally, 1985: pp 31-32)

From the beginning I was interested in applying some of the skills and ideas I had learnt as an undergraduate to explore meanings and social networks in rugby league. This rationale has remained the same throughout the research process - I wanted to know how and why the game was linked to certain localities and people, in this country, and how ideas

within these social networks had changed and were changing as both the game and the circumstances of the game changed.

It was incantations of a heroic struggle in the birth of the game of rugby league (see Moorhouse, 1989, 1995; Vose, 1992; Clayton and Steele, 1993; Clayton *et al.*, 1995a) that first interested me in the sociology of sport. As someone brought up in the culture of rugby league, I was exposed to the game's creation myths and morality plays from an early age. I knew it all, from the Split of 1895 referred to by Kenneally, to the machinations of anti-rugby league members of the Vichy government, who destroyed French rugby league in the war (for further details see Fassolette, 1995; Spracklen, 1995a; Dine, 1996).

As I developed an academic interest in history, sociology and philosophy, I realised the game of rugby league and the people it so often evoked in its own stories - as well as the images associated with the game - provided acres of intellectual space that had hardly been covered, with the notable exception of Dunning and Sheard (1979) and the historian Tony Collins (1993, 1995, 1996). But even Dunning and Sheard seemed to use rugby league as an adjunct for a discussion of the other rugby code. And in falling into the same old mistake of associating rugby league with professionalism, I felt they had not described the whole picture. Most rugby league in the world is played on an amateur basis. In this country, the British Amateur Rugby League Association represents over 1350 teams (BARLA, 1994) compared to the ninety or so teams that play under the banner of the 35 clubs of the Rugby Football League. 'Professional' rugby league is very much an 'amateur' game, whose players do not play full-time, and whose very existence depends on unpaid enthusiasts.

At first I was hoping to respond to Dunning and Sheard by using the figurational approach (Elias and Dunning, 1986) to explore these social networks. As a theoretical

concept, the figuration is undeniably useful. The idea of a network of inter-related dependencies in flux captures the dynamic of social interaction far better than the neutral concept of the social network. However, figurationism provided further problems with its seeming inflexibility over non-Eliasian ideas, its reliance on speculative metatheories such as the civilising process, and its lack of explanatory weight (Jary and Horne, 1994).

The game of rugby league is working class, attached to its northern roots by history and parochial affiliation. When this attachment perseveres even though the locality that produced it has changed, there can arise a community that is associated with a set of symbols, shared meanings or imaginary sites (Cohen, 1985). I realised that what I was actually looking at, the community to which I belonged, was an imaginary community delineated by 'the game', a collection of tacit understandings shared by its members, and that the old, geographical locality represented by the team was only a contingent part of this imaginary community. As the research progressed, the idea that the people I spoke to used 'the game' to identify with this ghost of the past, this *idea* of what it meant to associate with a rugby league playing district, became very important, as values in 'the game' were conflated with the values of the working-class localities as *they remembered them*. This process resulted in what Anderson (1983) calls imagined communities, where historical invention has resulted in a cohesive structure for legitimising a sense of community in the present. This was a process of reinvention of the past (Jenkins, 1991), inventing traditions that justified the values of the present (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

I chose a particular area of a northern city to which I owed my parochial affiliation as my case study, as it provided an exemplar of a working-class district in decline with a rugby league culture. I decided to explore 'the game' by using four clubs based around this district (professional, open age amateur, junior and women), to develop the theoretical

concepts of identity and belonging, and to shed light on this formation of an imaginary community. I started to ask why the people I interviewed attached themselves to this district and decided who belonged, even though many of them did not live there.

To give the research a comparative angle, I decided to follow a similar approach to rugby union by working with a union club in the same city. Would the same tensions and networks and ideas about belonging arise? I was also interested in the relation between the two codes, having experienced the divide myself, and this comparative element allowed me to bring out some of these ideas on professionalism and the relationship between the two codes. I was also interested in exploring what role the games of league and union had in creating male identity through enculturation at a junior level, and how women related to the masculine content of these games. The opportunity to work with a junior rugby league club was already part of my initial research rationale, but it was not until the concept of masculinity developed as a strong thematic that I decided to work with a women's rugby league club and women involved in the games, to try and elucidate their feelings about what they get from and give to these games.

This initial research problem directed me to a particular focus, to a local level of culture where a mix of history, sociology and anthropology would be needed to explore both games and see what they expressed about masculinity (Sheard and Dunning, 1973; Donnelly and Young, 1985; Messner and Sabo, 1990; Messner, 1992; Spracklen, 1995b), local and class identity, place and belonging (Dennis *et al.*, 1969; Clarke, Critcher and Johnson, 1979; Bale, 1982, 1993). As I progressed, it became clear that the idea of masculinity was a key to understanding the role of these games and their relationship with invented traditions from the past and imaginary communities of the present.

Getting started: getting it clear

'Since the settlement of a controversy is the cause of Nature's representation, not its consequence, we can never use this consequence, Nature, to explain how and why a controversy has been settled.'

(Latour, 1987: p. 99)

I had to find a method, or methods, that allowed me to be reflexive. Ideally, I would have liked to start the fieldwork without any *a priori* assumptions clouding the observational eye, but such an ideal can never be achieved (Chalmers, 1982; Latour, 1987, 1988). We bring theoretical baggage to any research - even our language is theory laden (Wittgenstein, 1968). This, of course, is not a bad thing, as the idea of research in its conventional sense suggests one starts with an idea, a focus, and explores it (Burgess, 1982). So I not only wanted to start with a theoretical and practical framework in mind, but the constraints of the PhD process demanded it. Even so, I wanted to be able to react as I progressed, and create a theoretical framework that came out of the data - I wanted my research to produce grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Ely, 1991), where I inferred the best explanation for the field (Lipton, 1991), instead of following the exemplar of normal science (Kuhn, 1962) in testing theories (Hempel, 1966) or falsifying them (Popper, 1968).

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that I was attracted to qualitative methods, following a number of methods including analysis of primary sources, semi-structured interviews and ethnography (Miles and Huberman, 1984). The epistemological underpinning to my research diverged from the conservative ideas of scientism that underly much 'positivistic' social 'science' (Gellner, 1985; Craib, 1992), and followed a different

paradigm influenced by Kuhn (1977) , Feyerabend (1975) and Latour (1988), one which Lincoln and Guba (1985) - among others - have identified as naturalism. As Bloor (1974) suggests, objective knowledge has been mystified as a quasi-grail which we, as latter day templars, must swear to seek without straying from the path to any Subjective Castle. Essentially, what I was exploring was not facts but the field, using my own role as an insider, to bring its meanings and understandings to the fore, analysing their social networks, at the same time synthesising new hypotheses about expressions of masculinity and imaginary community.

The main thrust of the research, once I had started my fieldwork, was profoundly altered by this naturalistic approach of generating ideas from the data, and vice versa. From an exclusive interest in the locality and its history I started to explore wider issues about the production of identity. The ethnography became a means to an end, rather than an anthropological end in itself. My ideas changed as the research progressed, and the field also changed with the Super League in league and the professionalisation of union.

The final rationale of the research can be paraphrased as follows:

1) To look at how a sport creates and is created by the identity and values of its participants (players, fans, administrators), and in particular how rugby league becomes a means of expressing masculine identity (and hence how expressions of 'working class' male identity have shaped the game over time).

2) To identify a community based around the idea of 'the game'. This is a community not of one particular space, but a community of shared experiences and understandings, as well as language (Jones, 1983), which have arisen historically both from the game of rugby league and from the real communities (northern working class: see Russell, 1988; Davies *et al.*, 1995) that share the inhabitants. In other words, people within

the imaginary community understand one another, they have mutual knowledge (Giddens, 1984), and hence these symbols and meanings create the boundaries of the community, on the edge and inside, rather like the layers of an onion or the levels of secrecy in a Masonic rite (e.g. the difference between knowing the names and the meanings in 'the game' of playing the ball, Rorke's Drift and jam eating).

3) To explore the relationship between the production of community and masculinity within 'the game' and tensions within 'the game' that arise from new understandings about what that "game" means e.g. Australianising influences, the Super League, professionalism, parochialism against expansionism, which will describe a relationship between old expressions of masculinity and 'the game' arising from its northern heritage (Russell, 1996, for research on cricket) and newer expressions supported by 'Australianisation', governing body policies, expansionists etc.

4) To expand and explore the theoretical concepts by changing the focus of the field and comparing the initial study with the experiences of people involved in a rugby union club, and women involved in both games: specifically, to work with a women's amateur rugby league club to see how they express their identity, and their experiences in coming to terms with the expressions of masculinity in the game. In doing this, the research takes on a comparative angle in a positivistic sense (Hempel, 1966; Kirk and Miller, 1986; Lipton, 1991).

In brief, the research is about the game's past, the way the imaginary community of 'the game' has made people (and myself) what they are, how people have argued over what 'the game' means (i.e. what is the spirit of the game), where the tensions arise in the present over these meanings, and what the future holds for 'the game'.

The Thesis

'Hobbits delighted in such things, if they were accurate: they liked to have books filled with things that they already knew, set out fair and square with no contradictions.'

(Tolkien, 1954:1981, p. 26)

It can be seen from the research rationale that there is no clear route from hypothesis to data to facts. My research model does not follow a conventional 'scientific' route, such as the hypothetico-deductive approach described by Hempel (1966), which according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba (1990) has served as a template for most positivistic research. Indeed, it could be argued that all conventional social research emulates the "scientific" approach, borrowing its rhetoric and rigour (Simons, 1989). However, not only have the canons of science such as validity, justification and objectivity come under intense criticism for not describing how science and scientists really operate (Collins, 1985; Latour, 1987; Gooding *et al.*, 1989), but my research just does not operate like that. It is a synthesis of *a priori* theoretical underpinning and theory generated from fieldwork. Hence there is a symbiotic relationship between my method, the data, the theory and the research rationale, rather than a synchronic procession of hypothesis-method-data-theory so beloved of caricaturists of 'natural' science (Merton, 1973).

However, it is difficult to present this symbiosis in the confines of a thesis with strict rules of conformity. Thus the structure of the thesis follows this familiar pattern of theory-method-results-conclusion, but at the same time it is to be understood and stressed that the relationship between idea and field was complex (Ely, 1991).

The rest of the thesis is divided into four sections of unequal length, which pertain to the four stages of the traditional thesis pattern. These are sections on theory, on method, on

presentation and analysis of the fieldwork and the issues raised, and a conclusion. It is to be realised that each section relies on the other, and there will inevitably be some cross-fertilisation' between them. However, this will be kept to a minimum to remove unnecessary repeating of concepts.

The first section is split into Chapter Two and a formal statement of the intentions of the research. Chapter Two defines the difference between a 'literature review' and a discussion of the theoretical framework, and favours the latter approach whilst reviewing relevant literature so that the framework can be identified. It discusses in length the key concepts that pertain to the research project, and how these concepts relate to one another. It draws heavily on the ideas of Cohen (1985) to describe the imaginary community, on the work of Messner (1992) to discuss expressions of masculinity in sport, and uses the concepts of Whig history (history to justify the present) and invented tradition as theorised by Butterfield (1931:1968) and Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) respectively. It then begins to apply the theoretical framework to the research project by discussing the use of history in legitimising the imaginary community of 'the game', and how cultural identity is expressed through the concept of 'northern-ness' - and different understandings of what that means - which are inextricably connected with gender, class and race. Following from this I make a statement of my theoretical intentions vis-a-vis the research project.

The next section begins to discuss methodology, and is split into two chapters. Chapter Three introduces the chosen field and gives a brief overview of the game of rugby and its bifurcation, as well as the district I used as a base for the fieldwork. From this description of the field I pose the question of method and begin to answer some of the theoretical issues that surround it. I discuss both epistemological problems, and ones of ethics, before criticising a number of possible methods and showing why an ethnographic,

qualitative approach was chosen. Chapter Four follows on from this to show what I actually did. I discuss the different methodological strands of the research, which expanded from simple ethnography to a more multimethod approach (Brewer and Hunter, 1989), utilising both ethnographic participant-observation, my own experiences (Ely, 1991), semi-structured interviews (Spradley, 1979) and secondary sources generated within 'the game' such as archives, newspapers and fan-written books. I suggest how I triangulated the research using these secondary sources and analysing history sociologically (Abrams, 1982), and discuss the importance of validity and reliability in qualitative work. Then I show how I analysed the work by discussing the role of a logbook in qualitative research, how I kept track of the data through categorising and filing, and how this helped to generate grounded theory (Strauss, 1987).

The third section, by far the biggest and most important, covers the ground where the field and theory meet. It is the section that deals with discussing the data and answering the research questions by showing how the field was perceived through the theoretical eye, and is divided into four chapters for the sake of manageability. Chapter Five is about rugby, and treats the clubs individually. It uses ethnographic work to build up a picture of the life of these clubs in certain situations such as training, socialising and playing. It discusses some points about ethnography, and my role as an ethnographer and rugby fan in the research. In this sense this chapter is very self reflexive. It then goes on to describe the games of rugby union, professional rugby league, and amateur rugby league in separate subsections that compare the ethnography with publicly held perceptions. It looks at the problematic surrounding amateur and professional, and the relationship between league and union.

Chapter Six approaches the concept of imaginary community, and the formal distinction between the clubs collapses as the concepts become the most important definers in

the text. I discuss the differences between the perceived community and the imaginary community, and describe the social networks that surround the games in the field. I introduce the idea of identity and belonging, and link these ideas in rugby league to the working-class constituency. The role of invented traditions and the media in legitimising these imaginary communities are described, and I give evidence for the existence of the imaginary community. I then proceed to introduce a dynamic and follow the boundaries of the imaginary community, how they are maintained, and the tensions that exist between rival definers of those boundaries. In particular I look at the tensions between traditionalist and expansionist.

Chapter Seven looks at masculinity in sport by using expressions of masculinity drawn from the fieldwork. It discusses the role of expressions of masculinity as cultural markers within the imaginary community, and how different expressions and 'traditions' of masculinity are evidence of the tensions raised in chapter six. I show that there are cultural and historical reasons for these differing expressions, though at all times I am more concerned with invented historical truths, rather than actual historical truths, as it is the former that have currency within the imaginary community of 'the game'. I show that expressions of this masculinity are in conflict as the philosophies behind the games are questioned, whether they are sports or spectacles, and that the media once again plays an important role as both definer of and defined from expressions of masculinity. The importance of this theoretical concept is shown by exploring the relationship between masculinity, 'the game' and identity in the production of 'northern man', and his enculturation from boy into the imaginary community and manhood. By way of comparison, I use my fieldwork with women in the imaginary community - players, fans and officials - to see what challenges and compromises are being made as these women negotiate a role and

identity for themselves from the masculine worldview as described by the men of 'the game'.

Chapter Eight brings these ideas together to discuss the invention of tradition and creation of cultural icons, in particular the imagery that surrounds the Split of 1895 and the amateur sportsMAN in rugby union. The cultural production of northern man is explained further, using the crucible of the sport and the imaginary community, and the way in which northern man is legitimised is discussed. The experience of those who do not fit the template inherent in 'the game' is shown by reference to Asian and black 'outsiders', through perceptions from within the imaginary community and the experiences of black players themselves (Long, Tongue, Spracklen and Carrington, 1995). Finally I address the idea of the working-class game, using perspectives from rugby league and rugby union, to show that the *a priori* assumption that is tacit throughout this research - that rugby league is a working-class game - is itself fraught with problems over definition, invented tradition and identity.

These four chapters contain the essential elements of the thesis, and as such are longer than the other chapters, and split into subsections for ease of reading, so that arguments and examples can easily be cross-referenced.

The concluding chapter looks backwards over the entire research project to summarise and answer the research questions. It highlights the similarities between the two games of league and union, how rugby can be described as 'boys playing with toys', and how sport is a site for the invention and defence of male identity. I then go on to suggest that there is a dynamic to these networks and expressions of identity as different interests try and reshape the boundaries - this is the result not only of public redefinitions such as the professionalisation of rugby union, but also tendencies to Australianisation, and the

redefinitions made by women and black players. This has produced perceived threats to what the population of 'the game' of rugby league see as their game. From these similarities I analyse the differences between the games, in particular the role of rugby league as a cultural icon of 'the north', and I discuss what this 'north' means, and whether rugby league's role is justified or contested. In particular, I discuss the role of rugby union in this 'north'. Finally I go over the thesis to answer some of the questions about the relationship between the games, the people involved and social identity, as well as pose new ones.

I also look forward, and use the generated theory to question whether these games are good for us. In particular, I relate the research and theory to practical issues that have embroiled both games whilst the research has been in progress: the Superleague and the professionalisation of rugby union. I analyse these events using my theoretical framework generated from the research, and speculate on the future of both codes, and the imaginary communities I have identified.

The thesis will also show the originality of the research, which arises from two sources. The case study is unique, exploring the under-researched sport of rugby league, and using a naturalistic, qualitative method to do so. Secondly, the thesis synthesises an original theoretical framework combining concepts in an innovative way.

Rugby union and league have changed dramatically during the course of this research. For the sake of any reader unfamiliar with the two codes (in particular league) Appendix One at the end of the thesis describes the origin of the two codes, and the shape and form of both when the research began.

Theory

Chapter Two

Facts and learning in the theoretical framework

'... the search for explicative laws in natural facts proceeds in a tortuous fashion. In the face of some inexplicable facts you must try to imagine many general laws, whose connection with your facts escapes you. Then suddenly, in the unexpected connection of a result, a specific situation, and one of those laws, you perceive a line of reasoning that seems more convincing than the others... but until you reach the end you will never know which predicates to introduce into your reasoning and which to omit.'

William of Baskerville (in Eco, 1983: p. 305)

In Umberto Eco's novel **The Name of the Rose**, a Franciscan friar called William of Baskerville is employed as an investigator into the mysterious death of a Benedictine monk. As the death toll rises and the mystery deepens, William explains to his companion Adso the logic behind his reasoning, which will, he hopes, lead to a theory that fits the facts and hence finds the murderer. What happens at the end, however, is that William's theory - while being wrong - leads him to the truth, which is far more complex than he believed. Eco's novel operates at a number of levels, as one would expect from a semiotician, and the key to the mystery is the pursuit and protection and interpretation of knowledge and the truth. That the "truth" is realised through a misreading of the signs, and a belief that no theory is absolute *a priori*, is a joke best appreciated by semioticians. That the mistaken man is a Franciscan - the order that pursued a new natural philosophy that revitalised Aristotelian learning - is a joke for medievalists. But the message is clear: beware confident explanations of truth.

Before the thesis progresses any further it is essential to elaborate and understand the theoretical underpinnings of the research, which have contributed and shaped the theory that has emerged. My research has not conformed to a traditional scientific progression of testing and evaluation, but theoretical truths of a kind are important, both as *a priori* influences on the nature of the inquiry, and as grounded theories developed from the interaction of this *a priori* knowledge with the 'revealed' truths from the field.

When discussing a theoretical framework it is easy to get confused over what a theory actually is, what its function is, and what it is saying. This problem of definition is both a semantical one and a philosophical one: hence before I explore the framework of ideas that has contributed to this thesis some definition has to be given.

What I intend to do in this chapter is to explore the concepts that I apply inside my theoretical framework, elaborating on the *a priori* knowledge I then use to develop an understanding of the field. What this chapter does not claim to be is a literature review. Such an enterprise should list and discuss the relevant literature around one particular field, so that opposing ideas can be tested and contrasted. A discussion of the theoretical approach inherent in the research, however, differs in style and content from a literature review. It picks out and defines key concepts, elaborates on the dynamic of the research rationale, and situates the thesis in the theoretical debate. The idea of a literature review suggests that the researcher is acting as an arbiter of truth, presenting arguments then making judgements. This does not describe my own access to the theoretical debate, which has come because of my interest in defining particular concepts of my own, and those that have emerged from the field through Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory approach (1967), which I discuss in Chapter Three. Following Guba (1990) and to a lesser extent Giddens (1976, 1984), I suggest that what is important in any

research is an understanding of the theoretical language pertaining to that research, rather than a somewhat artificial list of papers which adds only credibility (Latour, 1987).

I will summarise briefly some of the landmark concepts that have shaped the sociology of sport, and in particular engage with the controversy surrounding figurational sociology, which figured prominently in my *a priori* conceptualising of the theoretical framework. Then I will proceed to define and explore the main concepts that are used throughout the research, and which have come from the research: ideas surrounding identity and class, networks and community, the cultural role of sport in defining belonging and the role of culture in defining sport, historiographical arguments on the use of history, and expressions of masculinity and the role of sport in masculine definition. Finally, these divergent strands will be brought together and the common thematic throughout the thesis will be identified, before a formal statement of theoretical intentions is made.

On the nature of theory

The application of theory to research poses a number of problems. If we can define theory to mean, in a common sensical way, an idea that attempts to shed some light on a research phenomenon, then we can (ideally) describe data as either the phenomenon itself (data = reality), or an interpretation of that phenomenon (Craib, 1992). Generally, theory is seen as the brainwork and the data that is related to that theory comes from the research. In the sociological case, such data is presented in the form of interviews, observations and statistics. Yet the relationship between theory and data is not as simple as it first appears.

One argument is that theory must be explanatory (Friedman, 1974; Lipton, 1991). A theory must be able to explain the data, not just describe it. It is not enough to present the data, one must also say why the data is. What this entails is the traditional, scientific approach, which

suggests hypotheses taken from theory are tested by the field (Hempel, 1966). In essence, the field becomes a site for proving or disproving (Popper, 1968) theories. This approach has a number of flaws, especially when applied to sociology (Winch, 1958). It assumes a scientific method actually exists, though a definition of what that is has proved elusive to philosophers and sociologists of science (Feyerabend, 1975; Latour, 1987; Lipton, 1991). It ignores problems of objectivity, representation and truth correspondence (Hesse, 1980; Harre, 1981), such as the problem that any one set of data can be explained by a number of opposing hypotheses, with no way of deciding between them without recourse to inductive logic (Chalmers, 1982).

Another approach suggests that the researcher enters the field without any preconceptions, and listens to the field without prejudice. From the data collected, the researcher sees patterns that form ideas, which are supported by further fieldwork (Ely, 1991). This method forms the basis of naturalistic paradigms, and this position of theoretical production is known as grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). However, the assumption that anyone can enter the field without any preconceptions is untenable. We have all gone through a system that has enculturated us with mental tools of reckoning, language and perceptions that are all laden with theory (Latour, 1987). This thesis has used already a wealth of theoretical language with no apology or qualification, as it belongs to the tacit knowledge we share (Bloor, 1977; Collins, 1985; Simons, 1989). In addition, it can be argued that all data is theory laden (Kuhn, 1977; Chalmers, 1982). As Latour (1987) says of this problem, and the way in which it is approached, paraphrasing Dante:

'Abandon all knowledge about knowledge all ye who enter here.' (p. 7)

Schaffer (1989) describes the role of Isaac Newton's hegemony and self interest in early modern natural philosophy in ensuring Newton's optical data was accepted as 'true'. What counted for Newton was that the optical data conformed to his larger theoretical framework, and

data that did not conform challenged this framework. Hence, when he became President of the Royal Society, it became a matter of defining good results and good apparatus (i.e. what was real) as those that supported Isaac Newton. What is important in Schaffer's work is that data that is still used now (the data that helped design my spectacles) is not only theory laden, but shaped by theory. Harry Collins (1985) has also shown that theory plays a large role in shaping and describing data.

So the idea that we approach data without any theoretical assumptions is erroneous - it is unrealistic and elitist of us to expect we can shake off our preconceptions and indeed our cultural background (Thomas, 1979; Baudrillard, 1988), though some would claim to try (Gellner, 1985).

My solution is pragmatic, and attempts to avoid the pitfalls of philosophy that Craib (1992) warns theorists away from. The naturalistic paradigm is the one that has shown itself to be more useful for this thesis, as will be shown in Chapter Three. I am aware of the problems. I am creating language from the field, but at the same time I am working in a particular 'language-game' (Wittgenstein, 1968) that has a corpus of theories at its base. As Fleck showed (1935:1979) many years before Kuhn repeated the observation (1962), the production of facts and knowledge in academic enterprise is fostered by 'thought collectives' in which individuals operate in a particular normal paradigm (Kuhn, 1962). Some theories are givens, they are accepted as facts (such as logic, though see Woolgar, 1989), while others are contested (structure versus agency, truth correspondence, etc). I write in the language of the thought collective, I communicate with others who share the game. Hence my research has been informed both implicitly and explicitly by a number of *a priori* ideas, but these ideas do not have to force me down a particular route. My research is reflexive (Bourdieu, 1990), with a

theoretical framework that informs and analyses, so that new ideas can be synthesised from the combination of fieldwork data and initial theory.

The rule is one of healthy anti-dogmatism, until one has to suggest what is possibly 'going on', when it becomes necessary to formalise the theoretical framework and make conclusions and explanations of one's own (see Chapter Nine).

A brief review of the sociology of sport

Rugby league and union are sports. The idea that sport could tell us something about the people who played it, or that sport could give something to those people, is not new. Mangan (1995) has shown that the ruling class of England in the late 19th Century conflated their sport with their views on militarism and masculinity. Indeed, the role of muscular Christianity in the development of English ball orientated sports is well documented (e.g. Mangan, 1981, 1988; Mason, 1981; Holt, 1989). The details of the development of an academic interest in the sociology of sport do not concern this research, as they are documented elsewhere (e.g. Jarvie and Maguire, 1994). What was pertinent to the development of this thesis was the contrast between Huizinga's concept of a primal ludic element (1949) and the 'sport as strategy of oppression' theory that evolved through the work of Adorno and the Frankfurt school about the role of popular culture (for example, see Adorno, 1967). Huizinga identifies a basic human need for play in life, and describes how sport is an important site for the expression of this play element. This idea has obviously had mixed fortunes over the years, yet the idea that people play sport for fun sounds like a truism for many people. In the course of my research it became quite clear that sport provided enjoyment for many of those involved, even when the extent of that involvement caused them financial and health problems. Stebbins (1992) has identified a trend towards professionalism in the pursuit of leisure, where leisure (and sport) is pursued to extreme

levels of dedication, 'serious leisure', where time and effort invested in this pursuit is equivalent to that of a full-time professional: a concept that describes the situation in both codes of rugby. Kerr (1994), in exploring the reasons why football hooligans behave as they do, points to this fun element as a principle factor in their behaviour, using the concept of reversal theory (Apter, 1982) to explain that certain combinations of metamotivational states produce good feelings when the individual takes part in acts of violence. The link between the enjoyment of football hooliganism and the 'adrenalin rush' of sports like rugby league and union is a subtle one, though one which Kerr pursues (Kerr, 1994: p. 121)

The glib statements made by South African rugby enthusiasts during the Apartheid years that politics should be kept out of sport (Jarvie, 1985; Grundlingh, Odenaal and Spies, 1995) are seen now by most people as bad jokes. Again, the history of sport has shown that the social and political implications of sport were questioned as soon as mass participation emerged with the late Industrial Revolution and the free Saturday afternoon for English workers (Cunningham, 1980; Mason, 1981; Holt, 1989). The idea that sport was a diversion to keep the working class from revolution was a prominent one, as Mason (1981) describes in his history of the development of football. More relevant to this research is the role of amateurism in rugby, which was inextricably linked to the perpetuation of public school Imperial culture (Delaney, 1984, 1993; Holt, 1989; Mangan, 1995) and the marginalising of the working class, who did not fit in the world of the gentlemen amateurs (Collins, 1993, 1995; Delaney, 1993; Melling, 1994). Clearly, sport has a defining role in creating and maintaining political ideologies (Hoberman, 1984), though it can just as easily be explained as a site for (limited) resistance (Gruneau, 1983).

From the Frankfurt School, which applied itself to the understanding of what is through a critical reading of society, comes a more depressing description of sport, which challenges Huizinga's idea that sport is the sating of humanity's ludic element. Whilst Veblen (1925)

criticises sport for being a bastion of savage primitivism, Adorno and the Frankfurt School draw parallels with religion as described by Marx, the oft cited ‘opium of the masses’, as being a vehicle for the suppression of the masses by totalitarian states. As Adorno writes,

‘Modern sports... seek to restore to the body some of the functions of which the machine has deprived it [echoing the dynamic of philanthropist muscular Christians: Mangan, 1981]. But they do so only in order to train men [sic] all the more inexorably to serve the machine. Hence sports belong to the realm of unfreedom, no matter where they are organized.’ (Adorno, 1967: p. 81)

Adorno’s grim insight into sport found little favour amongst the handful of respondents I mentioned it to. This is not too surprising: as Adorno himself would comment, these people have been duped, which is what sport is supposed to do. Like other aspects of popular culture, it is the ‘opium of the masses’ for the critical theorists.

The issue at the centre of the Huizinga/Adorno discussion is whether sport is good for us. I will return to this issue at the end of the thesis, as issues of masculinity and community (which implicitly denies belonging to those outside) contribute to it.

Figurationism as an initial framework

In this country, theories on the significance of sport socially and culturally could, until recently, be categorised as ‘the Leicester School’ and everything else. When I initially developed my theoretical framework, the idea of the figuration appealed as a sensitising framework, to enable me to get inside and explain the networks I was studying.

Semantically, figuration carries a more powerful meaning than network, which has taken on many connotations away from the sociological domain. Yet in using the term figuration, one allows oneself to be drawn into the debate over the figuralists, and in particular the

metatheorising of their guru, Norbert Elias. The figuration, briefly, is described as a set of interdependencies connecting individuals, a dynamic structure whose centres of activity are in flux (Elias, 1978, 1982; Elias and Dunning, 1986). As used by Elias, the figuration becomes a dynamic network that subsumes the structure-agency debate surrounding sociological metatheory (cf. Giddens, 1976; Urry, 1982; Smith and Turner, 1988; Cohen, 1989), without giving up the modernist desire of scientificity (Winch, 1958) to postmodern ideas about localised discourses (Foucault, 1970, 1972; Baudrillard, 1988a). Figuralism also allows for the researcher to be involved with and detached from the field, and hence demands a method that gives the researcher this flexible stance towards the thing that is being researched (Maguire, 1988). The concept of the figuration has as its dynamic the metatheory of the civilizing process (Elias, 1978, 1982), which suggests that there is some progression through time of society, towards more civilized modes of behaviour. Organized sport becomes in the eyes of Elias and the Leicester School a site for the validation and confirmation of this metatheory. Rather than being a tool of oppression, as Adorno claims, organized sport is seen as a sign of civilized behaviour, a form of life where the natural violence of humanity is first controlled, then replaced with mimetic violence (Elias and Dunning, 1986). According to the figuralists, the history of sport shows a marked aversion to violence, and an increase in the codification of individual sports, which is evidence for the existence of the civilizing process.

The most relevant figural study on the development of sport, described by Jary and Horne (1994: p 76) as a “major landmark in the historical sociology of sport and leisure”, is Dunning and Sheard’s **Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players** (1979). This describes the rise of rugby from its folk roots as football, its codification at Rugby school, its spread through the country, the split between the two codes, and the problem of the amateur/professional divide. The increasing professionalism of rugby union, the professionalism of rugby league, and the

altering of rules to decrease the violence and injuries on the pitch, seem to support the civilizing process. Indeed, Dunning and Sheard report the frightening statistic of 71 deaths in the Yorkshire area in rugby's formative years (the 1880s) as a mass participatory sport, as proof that the game is now less violent (p. 220).

However, the book contains a number of errors, including that statistic, which according to the historian Tony Collins, is a vastly inflated error due to misquoting the original source. In conversation, Collins claimed that the original source mentioned by Dunning and Sheard, the Wakefield Express of 8 April, 1893, is incredibly unreliable and speculative. The most important oversight is a lack of acknowledgement of the existence of amateur rugby league, and an insistence that rugby union was amateur outside the north of England before the split, which was not the case (G. Williams, 1994; Collins, 1995). Dunning and Sheard argue that the industrial middle class who led the split of 1895 were merely bringing in a 'purer form' of bourgeois values to the game: "The middle class men who ran the Northern Union were thus engaged in an exercise in social control" (1979: p. 212). However, the dynamic behind the split seems to be, according to other historians, a more complex creature than the historical metanarrative that is the civilizing process. Although most rugby league historians still see the split as working-class rebellion against the cultural forms of the ruling class (e.g. Delaney, 1984; Gate, 1989), others argue that it was economic necessity and self-interest that led the large northern clubs to form a clique (Davies, 1988; Latham and Mather, 1993). Clearly, the reasons behind the split are not fully established by Dunning and Sheard. As Collins argues (1993, 1995), the relationship between the middle-class committees and the working-class players and members in the northern clubs was that of employer-employee, and the split was a concession made by the controllers of the clubs to the workers, in order to stop any further tension. Professionalism, however, was not the defining factor of the Northern Union (Delaney, 1984; Moorhouse, 1995), and amateurs

drawn from the northern bourgeoisie continued to play after the split, the most famous example being R. Edgar Sugden of Brighouse, the university educated son of the owner of the largest mill in the town, who played on as an amateur for the Rangers into the early 20th Century, only missing a season when he served as an officer in the Boer War (Adams, 1995).

The dogmatic fighting between the supporters and critics of figurational sociology continues apace (Horne and Jary, 1987; Jary, 1987; Dunning and Rojek, 1992; Jary and Horne, 1994). There is an issue of why Elias describes historical processes as he does. What is his motive for the civilizing process? It seems Eliasian sociology is very much a modernist paradigm, influenced by concepts of realism and theory testing developed out of the Vienna Circle and logical positivism (e.g. Ayer, 1959; Carnap, 1962), in the same way Popperian falsification owes the Vienna Circle a debt (Popper, 1968). The civilizing process is a progressivist account of society and society's history. Historiographers have warned of the dangers of making present-as-better judgements on the past, where history is written as a neat preface to the present, or a time just in the near future (Butterfield, 1931:1968). Such accounts have led to misrepresentations and omissions, as the writer attempts to draw a picture of historical progression which justifies acts and issues in the present: classic examples would be the historicism of Marx (discussed in Shaw, 1978) and Weber (1930). Less radically, progressivist accounts such as the civilizing process just do not explain the richness and diversity of human thought and action (Fernandez-Armesto, 1995), and often assume an ethnocentric history that makes the cultural and economic structures of the modern West an inevitable conclusion to History (Fukuyama, 1992).

Horne and Jary (1987), whilst complimenting figurationalism for taking the sociology of sport away from the margins of academia, launch a substantial critique at its fundamental concepts. They claim that, at best, figurational sociology is merely good sociology - historical sensitivity as suggested by Abrams (1982), awareness of processes and human agency in larger

structures - that did not need to be distinguished from the rest of the field. Certainly, figurationalists have produced some insightful and influential work, such as Eric Dunning's discussions on masculinity and sport (Sheard and Dunning, 1973; Dunning, 1986). Horne and Jary criticise figurationalism for what they see as latent functionalism (Parsons, 1961), parochialism within the theoretical domain and the seeming lack of class and gender analysis in figurational accounts. They also point to the claims made by Elias that although the civilizing process is directional, it can suffer regressions. This clause in the metatheory seems to be an afterthought, designed to explain the violence of football hooligans, behaviour which the figurationalists have focussed on in an attempt to both explain the problem through use of the civilizing process and prove the metatheory (Dunning, Maguire, Murphy and Williams, 1982). The result, Horne and Jary claim, echoed by Smith (1991), is that this makes the process unassailable. The figurationalists have committed a Popperian error, by responding to the falsification of their theory by finding a clause to defend it from attack (Lakatos and Musgrave, 1970). If results negate the civilizing process, the figurationalists can always claim a regression. The metatheory has become, to follow Popper (1968), a pseudoscientific hypothesis, untestable and hence of no consequence: the very thing Elias wished to avoid! It has become incommensurable, though its status as a new paradigm (Kuhn, 1962) is negated by Horne and Jary's assertion that it is merely sociology and speculation.

Responding to Horne and Jary's criticisms, Dunning (1992) suggests that the idea that figurationalism is a unique paradigm is not made by figurationalists themselves, though he reasserts its importance as a crucial idea in the sociology of sport. Its uniqueness, he argues, is due precisely to the civilizing process and the methodological idea of 'involvement and detachment'. That is, figurationalism allows both a sympathetic understanding of the field, and scientific objectivity. This doctrine, however, is criticised by Smith (1984), who claims the role of

'wise outsider' is one with no guidelines or calibrating methods. It is reminiscent of early anthropology (Burrow, 1966. Also Geertz, 1975; Latour, 1987; Tambiah, 1990), where the white man in his pith helmet watched the natives. Clarke (1992) suggests that the figurationalists are following an epistemology that demotes political-social ideals to the rank of fantasy by making claims for this detached observation of facts, though as I have shown, this scientificity is not applied to the civilizing process itself.

Figurationalist have made the claim that their critics do not understand the subtleties of their method and the civilizing process (Elias and Dunning, 1986). They are - although they may not explicitly describe it this way - trying to build a paradigm to challenge the existing normal sociology in a Kuhnian revolution (1962), though as Jary and Horne (1987) suggest, this attempt is both erroneous and unsuccessful. The debate has moved on. Jary and Horne (1994) reiterate their misgivings about the civilizing approach and the uniqueness of the approach, and criticise the emphasis on the control of violence. It is clear that the rigorous Eliasian is under threat as the metatheory is continually challenged, though the dismissal of the civilizing process does not mean figurationalism *per se* is bad. The idea of fixing sociology in the past, of researching historical sociology and following processes is supported by others such as Abrams (1982). And the concept of the figuration itself, of a network in flux with a shifting power base, is reminiscent of Foucault's description of power relationships (1980). The figuration is a convenient shorthand, and as the term is defined here I adopted it as a tool in the process of theorising throughout the developmental stages of the research.

Identifying identity: defining class

Class, as a definition of a particular social group, has come under sustained attack from many sources, including social theorists themselves. As an economic definer, class was

popularised by Marx and later Marxist social theorists (Giddens, 1981), and the working class was said to be that part of the labour force separated from the means of production in a capitalist society. While such a crude definition of Marxist theory does not do justice to the debate surrounding the metatheories of Marx, Weber, Durkheim *et al.*, it is a definition from which arguments can be formed, whether they go on to create rigorous readings of the power inequalities in the class system - where the economic class structure is the principal dynamic (for such scientific Marxism see Althusser, 1969) - or whether the concept of distance from the means of production and control gives rise to issues about hegemony (Bocock, 1988) and cultural difference (Thompson, 1963). Part of the problem in debates around class has been the one that concerns me: the one of definition. Just what is meant by class? The class definitions as used in most sociological research come from an economic reading of employment, and Runciman's recent reappraisal of classes in this country does not veer from analysis of economic power (1990). This may be fine to work with on a superficial level (Scase, 1992), but my initial exploration of the field suggested a far more complex interpretation of what class meant had to be broached.

Also, class analysis has been seen to be limited in its approach, and its origins in Marxist dialogues has opened it to criticism in the postmodern, post-Iron Curtain world. Just as Margaret Thatcher declared the death of society, John Major claims contemporary Britain is a classless society. Yet the rush to declare the class system dead is not merely a symptom of New Right politics. In *The Affluent Worker* (Goldthorpe and Lockwood, 1968-1969), it is claimed that the working class as a homogeneous group was a thing of the past, forty years ago! Clearly, all too often the analysis of what is meant by working class (and concomitantly, the middle class) has suffered from attempts to apply crude Marxist economic definitions, valid for the age in which Marx wrote, to changing societies in the Fordist and post-Fordist eras (Lyon, 1994).

Critcher (1979a) makes the claim that the working class is alive and well, even though social theorists may have to alter their perceptions of what that class is, and in the same volume Johnson (1979) goes on to define class as a cultural-economic entity in an attempt to bring the strands of Marxist theory exemplified by Althusser and Thompson together.

A cursory review of the games of rugby league and union will inform the observer that class is a concept often used to describe the origins and development of both games. In particular, the idea of rugby league and the split of 1895 as being part of the wider class struggle is one of the more dominant narratives in rugby league circles (Vose, 1992; Clayton and Steele, 1993): this theme, as I will show, is a strong one in the field I researched. In both games class is referred to as a means of defining an individual, the larger group, and in defining those not of the group. Identification of these classes is not as simple as may seem: a whole range of cultural and social devices are brought into play in defining them.

Although the industrial base that provided the working class with a base in the capitalist society has collapsed, there is still something that can be described as a third class in this country - only its life patterns and culture have changed with the changing economic circumstances. People still think in terms of 'us' against 'them' (Miliband, 1989; Evans, 1993), and the idea that rugby league is a working-class game is expressed by players and officials, suggesting they believe there is a working class to take part in it (Long, Tongue, Spracklen and Carrington, 1995), even though standard economic definitions give a result that implies the average rugby league fan is lower middle class (Long, Tongue, Spracklen and Carrington, 1995). This discrepancy is one that needs to be addressed, and a comparison with my fieldwork, along with an explanation, is given in Chapters Eight and Nine.

Jones (1983) and Cornfield (1991) suggest that class is a rhetorical construction that provides the source of the individual and collective identity of the members of that class. The

idea of class consciousness, or a negotiation of meaning inside a class or defining a class, gives an indication that the concept of class is not a simple economic definition (Davis, 1979; Koditschek, 1992). Paul Fussell (1983) examines the class system of the United States, and develops the idea that class is a matter of cultural status, where commodification of life has become the definer, and hence class is both displayed and recognised by commodified signs: clothes, food, holidays etc. Any attempt to define class has to move beyond the given definitions inherited from modernist social theory (Miliband, 1989). Class becomes a matter of language and consciousness, of definitions made by the user in an attempt to analyse and understand their own lives (Blumer, 1969; Schutz, 1972). Hence, in attempting to understand the relationship between themselves, their world, and their culture, people become conscious of what they are: in my research, this identity is often expressed in class terms, and the definitions they make are as much about community and culture as economy.

Social networks: space and belonging

Sport is a cultural activity that takes part at physical sites that extend into the environment (Bale, 1982; Jarvie and Maguire, 1994). In other words, it is possible to explore the social networks that pertain to this thesis, and the members of those networks, through an exploration of this physical space. It is on the pitches and in the clubhouses and pubs where most of my research took place. These sites provide loci for the figurations that surround the two sports, and can be analysed in the light of this social context, where the environment provides for - and is provided by - the social networks that interface with it (Dempsey, 1990; Bale, 1993).

Bale (1982) also examines the spread of sport in this country, and unsurprisingly finds a regionality inherent in rugby league. It is, according to Bale, a sport popular in a specific area of the urban north of England, in the small towns of south Lancashire, Cumberland and the West

Riding of Yorkshire (as well as Hull). Outside of Cumberland (or west Cumbria), the areas where rugby league is popular conveniently straddle the M62 motorway, and the 'M62 Belt' is a term used by people who follow the game to describe the rugby league heartland described by Bale. Such an analysis of rugby league's regionality in this country is uncontested (and often reiterated by rugby union writers cf. Laidlaw, 1974; Jones, 1994), though the game is played at relatively junior levels elsewhere in the country such as the south east and the north east (Schofield and Hanson, 1995), and a professional side operates in the capital (Farrar and Lush, 1995). Unlike league, rugby union does not show any great regionality, though Bale suggests it is more prevalent as an organised and mass participatory sport in the south west of England and South Wales (cf. Williams, 1985; Jones, 1994).

The reasons for rugby league's regionality have been described as being: self interest by clubs (Latham and Mather, 1993), failures in development (Dunning and Sheard, 1979; Moorhouse, 1995), inverse snobbery and parochialism (Farrar and Lush, 1995), class conflict and resistance from union (Melling, 1994), amongst others. Russell (1988) suggests that the game was stifled by the rapid development of football amongst the working class of the Midlands and the north of England, which effectively marginalised rugby league into isolated zones where the game became a definition of those zones. It is argued by others that this regionality is something that is inextricably connected to rugby league, that the game expresses an idea of 'northern' identity, where that is meant to mean the north of England (Moorhouse, 1989; Clayton and Steele, 1993; Davies *et al.*, 1995).

This idea of sport expressing identity through 'northern-ness' is developed by Russell (1996), who explores the role of cricket in shaping Yorkshire identity in the first half of this century, and how regional identity was then expressed back through the reports of Yorkshire Cricket Club at the crease: in particular how the county clash with Middlesex created a north-

south divide expression in which class was a factor - but not the definer. Cricket is also the subject of James (1963), who shows how the sport shaped and was shaped by those who played it in the Caribbean. Identity does not, necessarily, have to be about class (Joyce, 1995), and it can be seen that identity expressed through sport can be connected to, for example, regions (Williams, 1985), race, nationalism (Jarvie and Walker, 1994; Archetti, 1995) and gender - the latter of which proved to be of primary interest as my research evolved.

Ethnicity, and its role in defining social and individual identity, is similar to the idea of regionality in its relationship with sport. Sport can be a medium for racial discrimination (e.g. Snyder and Spreitzer, 1989; Cashmore, 1990; Jarvie, 1991), either through institutionalised racism or through a racist culture which attaches itself to that sport (Cashmore, 1990; Holland, 1994). It can be argued that the sports themselves are part of a racist hegemony, where perceived racial differences are presented as norms through unequal representation. For instance, team sports may show an unequal distribution of black athletes to non-central playing positions through what is termed stacking (Phillips, 1976; Snyder and Spreitzer, 1989). This problem has been identified - amongst others - in football (Maguire, 1991), rugby union (Wedderburn, 1987) and rugby league, both in this country (Long, Tongue, Spracklen and Carrington, 1995) and in Australia (Hallinan, 1991). Clearly there is more to the problem of racial discrimination and ethnicity in sport than stacking. In rugby league the problems identified by Long, Tongue, Spracklen and Carrington (1995) included abuse from crowds and players, a lack of support and a lack of access to the social networks that helped white players from an early age. Holland (1994) describes the double burden of black football players, who not only receive abuse about their colour, but also the general abuse directed at players, simply because of their 'otherness'. Sport can be a medium of expressing and exploring ethnicity (Jarvie, 1991), though as Fleming (1994) shows, the structure of sport in this country lends itself to white culture: the concept of

'northern-ness' which Russell (1996) explores is implicitly read as white, male north, and its attachment to cricket which he describes only excludes others (for example, see Henderson, 1995). Racism is an issue that pervades all of this country's contemporary culture (Solomos and Beck, 1994): sport is no exception to the rule.

But before this is added to the theoretical framework, the social network has to be expanded from the figuration to the dynamic behind the figuration: what is being sought through sport in the figurations it creates? What do the people in the social networks belong to? And who belongs? One of the principle concepts of the theoretical framework still has to be discussed: that of the imaginary community.

The imaginary community

The research thesis can be said to belong to a tradition established in British cultural studies of exploring the culture of working-class communities. In identifying this, I realised I was inheriting the community studies work of Hoggart (1958) and Dennis *et al.* (1969), who brought to life the northern working-class districts of Hunslet and Ashton. In both these communities the people were described as tight-knit, dependent on single industries (engineering and mining), and more relevantly to my research, both districts were and are part of the M62 belt. Ashton (otherwise known as Featherstone), a small mining town in West Yorkshire, became synonymous with rugby league during the publicity of the Super League affair (e.g. Beattie, 1995), when it was seen as a microcosm of everything northern: closed pits, boarded up shops, working-class pride, and rugby league. This image was fostered by protesters against the rugby league, who centred on Featherstone and declared their right to have a rugby league team, without which the town would have nothing (Clayton *et al.*, 1995a). Dennis (1969) touches

upon this role of rugby league in the lives of the people of the town, suggesting it shaped and was shaped by the people who supported it.

These large scale studies are criticised by Critcher (1979a) for a lack of rigorous theory and an absence of methodological description. He argues that they romanticise a way of life from which the writers are detached: Hoggart, for example, was brought up in Hunslet, and his study is criticised as being a form of nostalgia. Nevertheless, these studies are important, and stand alongside Thompson's tome on the postwar working class (1963) as showing the complexity and healthiness of working-class culture, and the experiences of working-class communities in the midst of the capitalist system.

Other community studies follow a more anthropological trend, dwelling on the immediate experiences of life rather than definitions of working-class tradition. These smaller scale community studies are more prevalent, though they tend to the study of isolated communities which are more homogeneous in terms of culture and identity (Bell and Newby, 1971; Cohen, 1982).

So far I have used community as a term without qualification. What it means, however, is still to be defined. In the sense used by Hoggart and Dennis my research is not a community study. The community, if it exists, is the locality of Sudthorpe, and a community study would explore life in that community from the interaction on the street, the people who work there, the pubs they go in, the clubs they join, and their leisure activities. This would be either through an anthropological study such as that done by Emmett (1964) on a North Wales village, or a study of the geography of the place such as Spink's (1989) paper on leisure facilities in Hunslet (Hoggart's study thirty years on), or ideally a combination of the two approaches. In this sense I am not doing a community study: I am simply exploring the figuration of sporting activity that is located contingently at a small number of related sites, which pertains to but does not shape the

identity of the locality. Hence, values associated with the sports and the social networks surrounding them may have come from, historically, the localities to which these figurations claim to pertain, but these figurations do not define those localities.

Early community studies tended to refer the concept of community to an unquantifiable spirit of egalitarianism and personal contact, and that the ideal community was a rural one uncluttered by the alienation of modernism. This could be observed by the fragmentation of city life (Redfield, 1955). This idea echoes the crisis in identifying the working class already mentioned, as analysts themselves are confused by change, seeing a breakdown in class and community when their conceptions of the world no longer fit their ideal description of that world. Yet a sense of community still exists even in the 'postmodern' age (Bramham and Spink, 1994), in urban areas as well as rural, 'idealistic' settings (Pahl, 1968; Bell and Newby, 1971). Oliver Williams suggests that community in urban areas needs to be understood as "a form of democratic participation... [where people] exercise initiative and create something closer to their liking" (Williams, 1971: p. 98).

Cohen (1985) suggests that the concept of community is situated in a context that does not have recourse to macrosociological explanations. He describes community as something that is symbolically constructed, as a system of values, norms and moral codes which provide a sense of identity to its population. He writes

'A reasonable interpretation of the word [community]'s use would seem to imply two related suggestions: that the members of a group of people (a) have something in common with each other, which (b) distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other putative groups. Community thus seems to imply simultaneously both similarity and difference. The word thus expresses a relational idea.' (1985: p. 12)

The emphasis is on meanings that are shared by the population within boundaries raised by the understandings that link the members together. So, “the boundaries consist essentially in the contrivance of distinctive meanings within the community’s social discourse. They provide people with a referent for their personal identities” (p. 117). The community, suggests Cohen, can be described as a bounded symbolic whole. Hence, this idea creates an ‘imaginary community’, which may be contingent with particular localities, but whose membership is bound only by symbolic boundaries, tacit knowledge and shared meanings. This role of meaning defined by usage follows Wittgenstein (1968). People make sense of what they observe from their own point of view, hence any interaction between people involves an exchange of symbols to enable one set of interpretations to be understood by the other members of the interaction: hence, the imaginary community becomes a place for the transaction of meaning, and access is achieved through an understanding of these meanings. One can see that the concept of the imaginary community describes a multilayered member group, with symbolic boundaries closing off inner levels. A suitable analogy would be an onion, with each onionskin being a symbolic boundary, allowing membership of the imaginary community at a number of levels. However, because the boundaries are created by the users, one can also have tension as meaning and symbols are contested and defined: thus the imaginary community gives us a dynamic picture of agency and structure, which combines neatly with the concept of the figuration. As Geertz writes, “man [sic] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he has spun... [whose analysis] is not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (1975: p. 5).

Anderson (1983) describes a similar community of meanings when he discusses the ‘imagined community’. But although there is a phonetic similarity, Anderson’s concept explores how a community in the present is defined by myths of the past it creates. In other words, the community makes a biased reading of the past to justify its values in the present, hence

legitimising itself as a coherent community. One can see that the imagined community is also one that is created and defined by symbols, though these symbols are historically contrived. Anderson's thesis explores how nations are maintained and legitimised through recourse to heroic, mythical pasts, such as the British Empire, but the concept can be used to explain the sense of identity that surround 'the black community', or the Featherstone of Ian Clayton (1993, 1995a, 1995b).

It is clear that the imaginary community concept explains what I am studying: an imaginary community that surrounds a sport, which collects its meanings from that sport. I am exploring the imaginary community of 'the game', whose members are people who play, support and organise rugby league. A similar imaginary community exists based on rugby union. Hence the tensions I saw in my research can be explained in terms of tension over the meaning of symbolic boundaries, and enculturation becomes a process of learning meaning to join the imaginary community. Yet the imaginary community is also imagined, as it draws on myths to legitimate itself: hence we have an imagined, imaginary community. The members of 'the game' often adapt the imaginary community by conflating the contingency of 'the game' with the locality of Sudthorpe, by referring to that locality when discussing identity. A key issue inside the imaginary community, as expressed by that part of it which has contingent links with the locality of Sudthorpe (that working-class locality in which most of the members of the imaginary community were born, and where the pubs and pitches of the social networks exist), is that 'the game' defines 'Sudthorpeness'. A similar suggestion permeates the rugby union club. For members of the imaginary communities, the imaginary community has become, as Cohen says, "a resource and repository of meaning" (1985: p. 118). Hence values associated with their understanding of the locality have become conflated with the imaginary community. As I will

show in Chapter Six and Chapter Nine, the result of tracing the imagined and the imaginary through the fieldwork sheds light on how identity is formed in the figurations of the two sports.

The idea of symbolic boundaries helps unravel the issue of insiders and outsiders. As Elias and Scotson (1994) show, collective identity is often defined by what it is not: once the outsider is defined, the insiders, *ipso facto*, are defined. The insiders refer to a 'significant other', and this definition is not always one of class or race. Boon (1982) argues that the boundaries are distinguished through the insiders' reading of how outsiders see them. Hence cultural difference is exaggerated as it distinguishes and gives both the individual and the collective an identity, a place in the chaos of life (Cohen, 1985; Elias and Scotson, 1994). By attempting to infer meaning, to create symbolic boundaries around themselves, people cannot avoid distinguishing others from themselves. Hence in the imaginary community, where there are different levels of belonging and contests over meaning, a situation is created whereby the simple insider-outsider model espoused by Elias and Scotson (1994) is replaced by a multifaceted system of identity. One can pass one symbolic boundary, but not another, and one can challenge meanings and gain access at a number of different levels. The imaginary community's symbolic boundaries thus become the key sites of negotiating belonging.

Cultural analysis

The relationship between the working class and the dominant class can be seen as a hegemonic struggle (Bocock, 1988). There is a power relationship that tries to infer the ideology of the dominant class on the ruling classes. The transfer of sport and the ethos of Victorian amateurism onto the subjected classes (Mangan, 1988) is seen in the development of Imperial hegemony in Wales through the spread of rugby union (Andrews and Howell, 1993), and the popularity of cricket in the Caribbean (James, 1963). Sport played a powerful role in creating

and maintaining the Imperial hegemony by distilling the culture of the ruling amongst the ruled (Stoddart, 1987; St.Pierre, 1990). Hegemony theory, which owes its popularity to the publishing of the works of Gramsci (1971) - who elaborated at length on the difference between the dominance of a ruling class and complete cultural hegemony of the ruling culture throughout the ruling and the ruled - has been criticised in its application to sports studies. MacAloon (1992) sees the centrality of hegemony theory as being detrimental to what he sees as class obsessed British cultural studies. He suggests that issues of hegemony detract from wider, global issues, of the felt experience of people in sport, and this makes cultural studies ethnocentric. In response, Hargreaves and Tomlinson (1992) say that the concept of hegemony, when applied to the analysis of structures in sport, emphasises both class and cultural practices. As Gruneau (1983) and Ingham and Hardy (1984) claim, sport does not necessarily have to be a medium for the hegemony of the values of the ruling class. It can, Gruneau claims, be a medium for counter-hegemonic resistance, where the ruled react against hegemony and try and overcome imposed cultural values. Both Jarvie (1985) and John Hargreaves (1986) explore this role of sport in challenging as well as maintaining hegemony. Morgan (1994), in a response to Hargreaves and Tomlinson, suggests that cultural practices may be distinguished by semiotic differences - identified by distinctions between the meaning of signs - not just class. Hence, hegemonic relationships can occur between any dominant-dominated twin, anywhere where there is a power relationship.

Williams (1977, 1981) develops the concepts of hegemony and culture in great detail. In **Marxism and Literature** (Williams, 1977) he develops a trifold relationship of culture. By culture it is taken to mean the cultural and ideological practices that pertain to a particular social group. At any one time hegemony produces a dominant culture, the culture which in contemporary society is taken as the template for good modes of behaviour and ideas. This is the

‘culture’ to which sections named so in newspapers refer to, things that are seen to have good aesthetic, intellectual and social power, such as classical music, literature, theatre etc. (Williams, 1981). However, the hegemonic relationship means that this dominant culture is dominant throughout all levels of society. Williams (1977) responds to this challenge by stating that - in opposition to the dominant - there will be cultural forms that are residual forms from the past, or emergent forms that may eventually challenge the hegemony. Hence there are three power relationships, and culture can be represented as a contested dynamic.

This concept can be and has been applied to sport (Ingham and Loy, 1993). Donnelly and Young (1985) use the idea of the dominant and residual to explain why modes of behaviour associated with rugby union in this country before the professionalisation identified by Dunning and Sheard (1979) became attached to the sport in North America. The idea of the residual-dominant-emergent can be used to explore the tensions within the imaginary community. That said, there are problems with the concept of hegemony as it is applied, as nearly always it is taken that complete hegemony has not occurred, and some form of resistance is in process. Foucault (1980) suggests that what is important when exploring power relationships is the actual distribution of power, which is never concentrated on one group. Hence, there is a constant interplay between sites of power, not a process of domination-hegemony that unequal power relationships imply. Hence, what Williams (1977) is describing would be an idealistic impression of the complexities of the centredless distribution of power. Applied to the tensions in the imaginary community this would appear to capture the dilemma between older meanings and new usages, though outside of the imaginary community the relationship between rugby league and the figuration of modern sport and rugby union may be best described using Williams’ terms.

The use of history: invented traditions

Whig history is a term first coined by Herbert Butterfield. He defined it as the tendency of historians to see the past as the story of conflict between progressives and reactionaries, in which the progressives win and bring about the modern world: an adequate description of the civilizing process. He suggested this historiography overestimated the likenesses between present and past, and assumed we always intend the consequences of our actions (Butterfield, 1931:1968). Whig history, then, supports a progressivist view of history, as if actions in the past are merely supporting acts for events in our time: Whig history is part of the modernist paradigm: it is the use of history for ideological propaganda (Wilson and Ashplant, 1988a). Sensitivity to historiography and the problem of interpretation is criticised as deflecting from accurate historical research (Carr, 1961). However, Jenkins (1991) supports this idea that there is a past, and a number of histories that can be written from it, and argues that the problem comes when history (an invention of the present) is confused with the past, which historians can only access partially through texts. Such history naturally comes a thing to be avoided, yet even with a sensitive awareness of Whiggism we still are bound by writing historical discourses in the present. Our historical discourses are inevitably present-centred (Wilson and Ashplant, 1988a, 1988b). In addition, our interpretive skills and our language are also centred on the present (Skinner, 1969), as well as our use of the discourse.

Baudrillard (1988a) makes the added claim that the past can only be seen as a symbol (or symbols), with a myriad of different interpretations, and we cannot know which historical discourse is the right one. Postmodern historiographers suggest that this is a hopeless task anyway, as there is merely a parade of localised historical discourse (Foucault, 1970; 1972). The task then becomes to explore and define these localised historical discourses. Instead of the truth,

we look at what people claim to be 'true' history, and ask why they have defined the past in such a way.

Imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) use history to justify and legitimise their existence. But they do not deal with the past: rather they work with myths and stories that are historicised. They are dealing with 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). In other words, people in the present make use of the past as a place where they can place genesis stories, genealogies of structure (Foucault, 1972), in order to legitimate claims and structures they may use in the present. This is not a conscious, manipulative design. Invented traditions serve a real need in the present, as they are the founding stories of the people who use them. It is clear that these invented traditions are more important in the research than a quest for 'what really happened', as they relate to the discourses that surround both 'the game' of rugby league, and 'the game' of rugby union, and the defence of the traditional against change.

Expressions of masculinity

The theoretical study of discrimination through gender is often related in discourse to issues of race and class. Yet while class has influenced the development of sociology throughout the 20th Century, both race and gender have been seen as less important or ignored altogether by the metatheorists such as Marx, Weber and Parsons. Engels (1972) derived male dominance as a consequence of male ownership of property, assigning gender inequality to the economic sphere, while Miliband (1989) - although exploring these issues - feels it necessary to subsume them under the banner of class discrimination. Nor is it just the Marxists who are at fault. As I have mentioned, figural sociology is heavily criticised for its lack of gender analysis (Jennifer Hargreaves, 1986, 1994; Jary and Horne, 1994): though Dunning has gone some way to

redressing this (1986), figurationism still seems to dwell on male sport and male issues such as football hooliganism, without analysing in terms of male identity.

Masculine studies have arisen from this imbalance, and the feminist reassessment of the lack of gender directed social theory (Kimmel, 1987; Brittan, 1989). In the sociology of sport the impetus to place gender on the agenda came with responses to male dominance in sport and sports theory that reflected that dominance (Hargreaves, 1990). This has taken, according to Snyder and Spreitzer (1989), the form of highlighting inequalities and attempts to redress imbalance in participation and perceived coverage, following a liberal feminist agenda (Messner and Sabo, 1990). However, it has been noted that there are more deep rooted social structures that have to be addressed to deal with the male dominance of sport. Critical feminists have pointed to a more complex relationship between gender, class, patriarchy and sport that calls for changes in the social structure (Hargreaves, 1986, 1990; Talbot, 1988).

Connell (1987) introduces the idea of the gender order, which describes gender as a process rather than a thing. Thus we are asked to study “a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity” (1987: pp 98-99). This gender order can be expressed through forms of cultural activity, which either maintain the gender order, or are sites of resistance to the gender order. Messner and Sabo (1990) suggest that sport is an ideal site to explore how the gender order is produced, maintained and challenged because of its relationship with masculine identity. As Horrocks corroborates, “male sport is (important) in the consolidation of various masculine images and lifestyles” (1995: p. 4).

Masculinity is tied up with sport and sport's identity, a relationship established by Dunning (1986), Hall (1988), Whitson (1990), Messner (1992) and Morgan (1992), amongst others. As Clarke and Critcher (1985: p. 162) comment, “sport remains an area where existing

gender roles are re-established and confirmed". Competitive sport can be said to maintain gender divisions and perpetuate the rituals of masculinity (Bryson, 1990; Morgan, 1992). The historical dominance of men in sport - or the dominance of men in sports history: challenged by Hargreaves (1994) - although connected ultimately to the patriarchal nature of western society, was enforced by Victorian ideals of muscular Christianity and the belief in sport as a means of 'making men' (Mangan, 1981). Hoch (1972) describes sport in a similar manner, as a 'school for male dominance', and Thompson (1995) explains how rugby league gave him the confidence to be a man.

The feminist study of sport and masculinity belongs to the wider domain of the study of men and masculinity (Kimmel, 1987) which sees feminism as a way of exploring the male dominance of society, of "developing an analysis of men's problems and limitations... within the context of a feminist critique of male privilege" (Messner and Sabo, 1990: p. 13). Hence, one can describe sport as a social construction which helps to form the hegemonic relationship of men over women. Whitson (1990) argues that sport continues to bolster this hegemonic masculinity by the ritualisation of aggression, strength and skill in the male body and linking it to achievement. In other words, sport becomes a way of reaffirming male identity (Nankervis, 1994), as well as producing it through male exposure to sport from an early age (Messner, 1992).

Dunning (1986) describes the male dominance of sport that can be seen in the games themselves, which are institutions in which physical strength and fighting skills are celebrated: therefore youngsters are constrained in seeking ways of expressing their maleness. Sabo and Runfola (1980) and Nixon (1993) concentrate on the pain principle and sheer physicality of sport as the focus of masculine construction, while Kane and Disch (1993) examine the attitude to women and the violence fostered by the sporting subculture through a locker room incident

between male players and a female reporter. Gruneau and Whitson (1993) use ice hockey as a site to bring some of these ideas together, specifically the ritualisation of masculine endeavour and the glorification of the brawl. In my research, fighting on the pitch was given prominence in the recollections of players, and others in 'the game'.

Another important aspect of the connection between sport and masculinity is how sport is described in explicitly masculine language in an attempt to normalise the dominant masculinity and hence maintain the gender order (Duncan and Hasbrook, 1988; Horrocks, 1994). The use of war metaphors in the commentaries around American sports has been described by Jansen and Sabo (1994), who connect these war metaphors in sport to sporting metaphors in war, arguing that this cross-fertilisation of symbols and language is evidence of how hegemonic masculinity defends itself when under pressure. Mangan (1995) has also made the explicit connection between masculinity and male pursuits of war and sport.

McKay and Rowe (1987) look at the legitimisation of masculine hegemony in the Australian media, and the lack of coverage of women's sports, that "reinforces beliefs that sport is an activity at which males are naturally more adept than females" (1987: p. 260). Bryson (1983) comments on the masculine imagery present in advertisements for rugby league in Australia, and although Lynch (1993) claims that expressions of masculinity in rugby league are being challenged in a deliberate attempt to attract new audiences, recent images in its marketing suggest older expressions are still prevalent. In Australia one player advertised boots with the soundbite "I wouldn't die for my team, but I'd consider going into an extended coma for it" (the pain principle: Sabo and Runfola, 1980), and in this country the 1995 Premierships were marketed with an explicit link with famous battles (Spracklen, 1995b, and Chapter Seven). Clearly, both advertisements are aimed at young males to bolster their masculine identities by associating with an explicitly masculine sport. Berger (1972) has outlined how the language of

advertising works to create images of masculine power and feminine desirability, while Easthope (1986) describes how the 'masculine myth' present in popular culture naturalises, normalises and universalises the dominant masculinity. As popular culture, sport and the culture around sport reveal similar discourses.

By masculinity it is taken to mean the processes and ideas that go towards the construction of male identity. However, the concept of masculinity is sometimes overused without any clear definition of what it is. It becomes self evident if we talk about the social construction of masculinity that there can be a number of masculinities: dominant heterosexual, homosexual, marginalised and so on (Connell, 1987, 1995; Messner and Sabo, 1990). That said, there is a hegemonic masculine identity that has been imposed so thoroughly on western culture that most observers take it as a norm: that of the dominant heterosexual male identified by Gilmore (1990), the impregnator-protector-provider. Gilmore argues that this cultural role of man, historically, has contributed to the aggressive, dominating acts of bravado that identify what Mangan (1995) calls the Ubiquitous Male in contemporary society.

This idea of a masculine archetype is challenged by work done in both psychology and sociology on the fragility of male identity (Brod and Kaufman, 1994). That man was created and instinctively became the Ubiquitous Male is contested by Goldberg (1976), who explored the socialisation of boys into tough manhood, and the emotional trouble and identity crisis this engendered. Hearn (1987) suggests that the concept of masculinity is weak, and that instead we should look at how maleness is theorised, and what types of masculinity are produced. The struggle of males to define themselves has also been observed by Middleton (1982) and Horrocks (1994), who see a crisis in man over what it is to be one, what types of masculinity are acceptable. Horrocks also explores the psychology of masculinity, taking as his starting point the importance of the individual in defining his own identity from 'male myths and icons' (1995).

Craib (1987) observes that masculinity is often organised not in a positive way, but as a reaction to that which is feminine. This thesis explores only how the hegemonic masculinity prevalent in western culture is expressed through the two sports in the research. The key word is expression. What the research reveals is how masculinity is expressed in the field, how it is shaped and supported and understood through behaviour. Through this one can then see how differing expressions are in tension with each other, reflecting tensions within the imaginary community over who and what defines the boundaries: in this case male identity. Hence the conceptual problem over the use of masculinity and the realisation of differing masculinities is sidestepped. As Connell (1987) suggests, there can be competing expressions of masculinity, and the cultural setting of the masculine construction must be taken into account. Following Williams (1977), it can be seen that the expressions of masculinity observed by Sheard and Dunning (1973) in the public school influenced rugby club refer to the same dominant masculinity as the expressions of masculinity that surround Australian rugby league (Lynch, 1993; Nankervis, 1994) - in other words, what alters is the place in the imaginary community, and the expression of male identity, not the hegemonic conception of masculinity.

There are a number of themes in these studies of masculinity and sport: masculinity developed through endurance of pain, the game as war/the physicality of the game, the attitude to women/women players, violence as a norm, the ritualisation of manhood, enculturation from boy to man, the will to win and drug use to achieve success, reaffirmation of male identity through social cohesion and marginalisation of others (e.g. homophobia) and the importance of coaching and literature in maintaining ideas and expressions of masculinity. One of the most important studies that draws together these themes is **Power at Play** by Michael Messner (1992). Messner studies the backgrounds of college athletes and explores their enculturation into sport and maleness through the American sporting system. The cruel nature of this enculturation,

where success is seen as the ultimate factor, and obliviousness to pain and a dismissive attitude to women are encouraged, is explored in great detail. While the American system differs from that of rugby league and union in this country, Messner's study provided a suitable role model for my own research, as it is how masculinity is expressed, not what masculinity is, that Messner tackles.

Defining definers: language and myth

The role of the public domain - discourse and media - in producing and promoting sport is clear (Eco, 1986; Bourdieu, 1993). The research is an exploration of the symbolic boundaries that surround imaginary communities, and the tension over definition of meanings within - and meaning as broached by definitions created in the public domain - by administrators and sponsors who wish to impose their own ideas, and by people involved in the games on the terraces, at the clubs, and on the pitches. This creates an unavoidable tension between those who, referring to the outside and public, define meaning through external, objective rationality, and those who use the tacit, interpretive rationality of the insider. It is the tension between definitions from causality and definitions from participation (Tambiah, 1990), or as Foucault suggests, the doctrine of representation versus the doctrine of resemblance (Foucault, 1970). What becomes important is how language defines meaning through usage (Wittgenstein, 1968).

What this thesis is focussing on is hermeneutics, 'the theory of interpretation of meaning' (Bleicher, 1980). In particular I am exploring ideas based on semiotics, 'the science of signs' (Craib, 1987; Eco, 1994), and the idea of the myth in shaping the symbolic boundaries of an imaginary community and defining what it means to be a man. This myth is bound up with sport, and rugby league, since sport itself is part of contemporary popular culture (Snyder and Spreitzer, 1989). Barthes (1972, 1977) describes how a particular way of speaking can become

the modern mythology. He describes how a sign already formed with its own specific context becomes a signifier for another sign. It is this second sign that becomes the myth, which is normalised and historicised. Hence masculinity, and expressions of this dominant masculinity, have become part of 'the game' through discourse over meaning and the use of invented traditions to legitimise and support it.

'Northern-ness', 'the game', and the ritualisation of manhood

The key concepts of the thesis - imaginary community, expressions of masculinity, Foucauldian power relationships, invented traditions and myths - have been discussed. The principal idea running through this theoretical framework is an idea drawn from postmodernity (Lyon, 1994) and post-relativist philosophical discourses (cf. Latour, 1987, 1988) which rely on a Wittgensteinian interpretation of how language is used to define meaning in discourse, which in turn shapes our understanding of the external. Postmodernism as a cultural project can be criticised for both devaluing analysis and the project of explanation (O'Neill, 1995), and can also be accused of suffering the same problems of representation and normalisation as the approaches to truth it was supposed to replace (O'Neill, 1995). As Callinicos (1995) claims, postmodernism has become a Kuhnian normal science, protected from criticism and becoming an orthodoxy. The debate over the 'devaluation' of truth and rationality, which the opponents of the philosophy of postmodernism claim devalues the entire academic enterprise (Gellner, 1985; O'Neill, 1995), is a seemingly intractable one. While Zygmunt Bauman favours the retention of rationality and objectivity in researching the postmodern (Bauman, 1992), we are still faced with this problem over the philosophical weakness of rationality and objectivity (Chalmers, 1982; Fuller, 1988; Arditi, 1994), the weakness that indirectly created the postmodern dilemma that faces us.

The approach I favour follows Latour (1988) by exploring how people come to create their own realities, their own givens, and how these relate to one another - not to an external truth. It puts epistemology before ontology. Hence, ideas about 'northern-ness', 'the game' and the ritualisation of manhood can be analysed and identified without falling into the Slough of Despond that traps modernist and postmodernist alike. To use a rugby analogy, I have sidestepped the problem by concentrating on how my theoretical framework is constructed, and how that explains a process of construction that takes place in the field which those who have constructed it take as their 'truth': their Wittgensteinian world-view (Barnes, 1977).

The theoretical framework I am employing, the position of my thesis in relation to other work, can now be summarised. My research draws upon the work of A. P. Cohen (1985) and Benedict Anderson (1983) on the creation of a sense of community through the use of shared meanings and belief in invented traditions and myths. The focus on shared meanings makes my work indebted to ideas developed from semiotics and discourses on language (Barthes, 1972; Baudrillard, 1988), and the historical nature of myths allows the framework to be situated in the 'tradition' of historiography that explores the relation between the writer (the user) of history and the historical stories they write (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Jenkins, 1991). Again, this idea of an exploration of what counts for truth and what people perceive is directly related to the Latour/Wittgenstein enterprise. The sports themselves, which are the repositories of most of the signs and symbols and myths that create these imaginary communities, can be described as belonging to a figuration, though one that is described as a dynamic network, not an Eliasian frame of reference. These imaginary communities provide identity for their populations, and a level of entry and belonging, as well as tensions over defining meaning and myth. The conflation of the imaginary community with ideas over what counted as a 'real' community allows me to explore the origins of some of the meanings and myths that surround the imaginary communities

of rugby union and rugby league - known in shorthand as 'the game' (of union or league) - through contested expressions of identity that arise from localised interpretations of 'the game'. Ideas about 'northern-ness' (white, working class, male) are equated with 'the game', and are defined to exclude, with distinctions between who is inside - who belongs - and who does not: issues about class and masculinity bring me into another field of theory. Drawing on the work of Connell on the gender order (1987), and Messner's application of Connell to sport and expressions of masculinity (1992), I am using the idea of the expression of the hegemonic masculinity within the imaginary community of 'the game' as a way of exploring the tensions within over the meaning of the symbolic boundaries.

Hence, the relationship of my research to previous literature is a complicated one. However, the three main concepts of my framework - imaginary community, invented tradition, expressions of masculinity - have all been identified and placed, and the subtext of the thesis - the construction of meanings and reality through language and consensus - has been discussed.

Formal statement of research aims

I am exploring how a sport can become the focus of a collective of people sharing similar worldviews and perceived backgrounds, creating an imaginary community that is the amalgam of perceived values within that game and invented traditions based on present-centred readings of the community's 'real' origins. How individual identity is expressed is defined by the boundaries of this imaginary community, which are created by insiders privy to tacit knowledge. However, the imaginary community is a dynamic, and the boundaries are contested and maintained by a constant tension of production and reaffirmation. The research focuses on expressions of masculinity in two similar games that have totally dissimilar 'worldviews' (though a related history) as an attempt to explore this process of enculturation and defence of the imaginary community, and in doing so becomes bound up in public discourses about the two games viz. the amateur professional divide and its relationship with class.

How this is done is discussed in the next two chapters.

Methodology

Chapter Three

Turning lead into gold: methodological problems

'Look here, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, we are all ready to acknowledge that you are a smart man, and that you have your own methods of working. We want something more than preaching or theory now, though.'

(Mister Gregson, in Conan Doyle, 1887:1992, p. 36)

Sherlock Holmes, the famous fictional detective, inevitably delivers answers with almost mystical ease, baffling those around him who struggle to follow the detective's method and reasoning. In the first (and second most famous) Holmes story, **A Study in Scarlet**, he solves a complex crime of passion and revenge by the power of his deductive mind and his particular method of forensic analysis and observation which was still, at the time Conan Doyle was writing, a novel approach in criminal investigation. Hence it is no wonder that Gregson, one of Scotland Yard's finest professionals, is bemused over Holmes' method, and how Holmes used that method to come to an undeniable truth. In response to questions of method, Holmes is reticent throughout all his published adventures, finding pleasure in solving mysteries and not in explaining how he came to his solutions.

However, Conan Doyle ensures that his detective's methods are revealed, through the device of Watson as the narrator and loyal associate of Holmes, who asks the questions the reader demands, and who shares in our amazement at the detective's genius and confidence. Holmes' method, and the answer it reveals, do indeed become elementary, once it is revealed

through the narrative device at the end of each story, though most of the text has us wondering at the methods and reasoning of the amateur detective who defined an entire genre.

In real life, and in writing a thesis in particular, one does not hide or mystify the method that has been used to create or support an argument or truth claim. Nor can one rely on a faithful Watson to document our progress. In writing up any research, the method has to be documented, so that the reader and critic can examine what it is one has done to create the data one then analyses and uses (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973), whether one is testing or creating theory. The method, and a discussion of method, opens up the research and is the site of a number of relevant debates over the value of any particular thesis (e.g. see Mills, 1959).

This chapter and the next give the thesis explanatory weight by showing how the data I use in the thesis have been gathered, and what I did in defining what it was I wanted to study. Given the theoretical rationale of the research at the end of the last chapter, the next logical step would be to define the particular field 'out there' which would serve as the basis for the research, which would itself relate to the theoretical questions and the development of the research in terms of analysis and synthesis (of ideas).

Chapter Four discusses what I actually did: my methodological style and my analysis of the data the method provided. Before a description of method can be given, however, it is necessary to pose a number of questions about what it was I wanted to achieve in terms of my methodology, and how my aims were associated with philosophical problems around validity, knowledge, involvement and ontology. This is the basis of this chapter: the philosophy of methodology. When these questions are themselves discussed and analysed in terms of the overriding thematic raised in Chapters One and Two, it will become clear that a particular methodological style, associated with a particular paradigm of research (Kuhn, 1962; Guba, 1990) was not only amenable to my theoretical aims - it was also necessary.

This still leaves the field itself, and it is where and what I studied, and the ethical issues this raised, that I discuss next.

Defining the field of play

Poor jokes aside, the most important methodological decision I had to take was the answer to the question: so what am I going to do? What I wanted to do was to explore rugby league and rugby union using the theoretical framework in Chapter Two and the concerns in Chapter One, but without a clear focus such an aim will be hard to complete (Burgess, 1984). It is a fortunate person who is able to start from the least defined principle and work towards a clear picture. Following Schatzman and Strauss (1973) I felt it was necessary to have a starting point, a framework of the external field with which I would interact. Saying rugby league would be my starting point was not enough. I had to know where to start, and where to place my own methodological boundaries - otherwise, I would still be out there, wondering whether I had done enough, or whether I had found what I wanted. In other words, I had to have a specific idea of the field, and where I was to do my fieldwork and data collection (Schtazman and Strauss, 1973; Burgess, 1984; Miles and Huberman, 1984). That is not to say that this field was sacrosanct. It was merely a beginning, a helpful definition around which I would work and explore ideas (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Blumer, 1969), and as I will show in the next chapter, this initial definition was to be challenged and changed (as in Fontana, 1994) as the research progressed.

The questions raised in the first two chapters, in a sense, had already defined my starting point. Competitive team sports have their own inbuilt structure of clubs and leagues, and I had a number of polarities that seemed sensible to work around, particularly amateur-professional and union-league. In addition, and as the research rationale was fine tuned, issues around male-female and the enculturation of youngsters into the networks and ideas raised briefly in Chapter

One and elaborated in Chapter Two (such as masculinity, 'the game' and 'northern-ness') defined further avenues of research.

The step from the research rationale to definition of the field was neither a eureka moment or a carefully negotiated procession of ideas. It was always clear in my mind that to research rugby league, which was to be the central definer in defining the field, I had to look at rugby league clubs. From this the field can easily be extrapolated. I could either do a cross club analysis of all rugby league clubs, or focus on a small number. The latter alternative suited my research aims and theoretical considerations the best, which was the crucial decision in my initial definition of where I was going to 'do' the research (Burgess, 1984). I decide to concentrate my attentions on one particular area of the north of England, where rugby league was played at both amateur and professional level, and where rugby union also had a strong presence. The area, the southern parts of a large city, was chosen because it met these criteria, and also for ease of access (Burgess, 1984).

In deciding where I was going to start my research, it was easy to fill in the detail about who and what I would investigate. I decided to approach the field through a number of clubs in the area, each of which represented an aspect of the polarities and issues mentioned above and in chapter one. These were:

- a) a professional rugby league club
- b) an amateur rugby league club
- c) a rugby union club, with a junior section
- d) a junior rugby league club
- e) a women's rugby league club (identified and explored later in the research process)

In aiming to approach five clubs that fitted these parameters I felt confident I covered enough aspects of the field to seriously tackle the research problematic I had identified. The area

was also sufficiently large to provide me with a number of options regarding the clubs, should access fail (see Chapter Four). Of course this did not and could not give me a rigorous and concise data collection, but as I will show, such criticism became irrelevant as my methodology was defined. What this approach allowed was an exploration of local social networks that had built up around these clubs, and gave me the opportunity to ask whether these clubs had any relationship with the locality that was serving as a framework for the fieldwork.

So this was my initial definition of the field where I was to do my research, and what it entailed: a study of a number of rugby clubs (league and union) that represented different types of club identified in my initial rationale, and which were situated in a particular locality. As I will show in Chapter Four, the field became more problematic to define as new ideas emerged.

Ethical considerations of doing research

I felt confident that my particular field of study would be less sensitive than, for example, research into the subcultures of joyriding. Nonetheless, from the start I was aware that the single most important consideration to any research is the ethical one. This is not a dramatic statement. As researchers, we are responsible for the maintenance both of the respectability of our trade, and the outside world we study. In a sense, all research is problematic in that the dominant paradigm of scientificity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1989), exemplified by Star Trek's famous "to boldly go where no man (sic) has gone before", is parasitic (see Haraway, 1989; McLaren, 1991). In researching anything, the researcher assumes a dominant role in which they analyse and report what is 'out there'. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest, the researcher inevitably creates a power relationship with the field, in which the researcher defines the course of the research. This may not be such a revelation. It is the researcher, after all, who is doing the research, which is itself directed by the aims and needs of the researcher's ideas.

However, the ethical consideration of embarking on such an uneven power relationship, especially when one is interested in living people - who have their own desires, values, beliefs, interests and patterns of behaviour - must be taken into account (for a convincing argument against the supposed neutrality of researchers see Clough, 1992). This ethical issue of power and the subtle difference between use and abuse is never clearly defined in standard texts on methodology and approaches to research, mainly because the orthodox paradigm of social research must avoid the issue if it is to operate (Kimmel, 1988). For example, the anthropological sensitivity displayed by ethnomethodologists like Garfinkel (1967) is very questionable ethically, and even Cohen (1978) and Whyte (1993), two sources on which I drew in doing my own research, show no concern with the entire ethos of humanistic research, which is to (ab)use other human beings in the cause of the researcher.

Another related ethical issue is that of professional standards regarding access to the field and accessibility of the researcher. Punch (1986), in challenging commonly held assumptions about the behaviour of researchers and their sensitivity to the demands of the researched (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Ely, 1991), argues that it is not necessary for the researcher to be worried about meeting the requests of the researched. He suggests such ethical concerns about professional standards are outdated, philosophically untenable given the politicisation of research, and clash with the ethos of research, which he claims is the quest for truth. While there may be an argument from philosophy that suggests assumptions about sensitivity are barriers to research, those barriers are there for the researched, not for us. Hence one has to get agreement at every stage of the research, one has to agree to report only things that the researched want to be reported, and one cannot avoid any other demands the researched may make (Soltis, 1989). This is not just an ethical issue underpinned by honesty, reliability and fairness, it also impinges on the professional status of research. One bad researcher who deceives and abuses their power

means other researchers are seen in the same light, including any who might return to the same ground (Sieber, 1992). For instance, if I had treated my field shoddily, it is not only wrong on them, it also gives them a tainted impression of researchers in general.

In the case of my research, the principal ethical problem I have had to address is that of confidentiality (Kimmel, 1988; Sieber, 1992). Throughout the research I had to grapple with this problem, as it is in many respects diametrically opposed to another ethical issue: that of telling the truth and presenting one's work so that others can follow it. While every attempt has been made to keep my research ethically sound in the sense of non-deception, I came to the conclusion that the first priority was the wishes of the people I spoke to: as such, permission was always ascertained at the end of every interview to use material (Spradley, 1979; McCracken, 1988). As I will discuss in Chapter Four, access and permission to use data was negotiated under the assumption on the respondents' behalf that rules of anonymity were followed. Where things were told in confidence, there were further problems about whether I could use them as a researcher: in every case, if there has been any doubt, I neglected to include material, even though it may have been useful theoretically. Of course, this cannot be applied to public situations, where one is reporting, for example, chants in a crowd. It is unrealistic to expect to get permission from large groups of anonymous people (Wax, 1982; Punch, 1986).

I found it ethically more sound to use pseudonyms for people involved in the field, and to tinker slightly with sources to protect their anonymity. Where a few of my respondents did not mind being quoted, the thesis in its entirety has to be altered to protect those who expressed a desire to remain anonymous. Hence I have not only had recourse to individual pseudonyms, but I have also hidden the identity of the clubs and the area of the north of England I did my fieldwork in. Again, this is normal practice in social research (Sieber, 1992). In the writing of the thesis, it became clear that a plethora of pseudonyms would be confusing, so in many places all I

have referenced is 'a respondent', or if some point is being made where identity is pertinent, I have used descriptions such as 'ex-professional player'. Only where sources such as books are cited, or I interviewed a respondent with intentions of publicity made explicit, are real names used (in this instance the reliability of referencing and the naming of written sources is seen as important) - and where necessary their relationship with data revealed anonymously by the same individual is hidden.

One can see this raises questions about validity and the reliability of the research, but I believe these questions are less important than the expressed wishes of some of the respondents. Although the issues I was studying may appear not to be sensitive, and although the cognoscenti may be able to decipher the descriptive data to name places and faces (Punch, 1986), I feel I have had to respond to the ethical problem of confidentiality in the only way one can.

The issue of my own role as researcher/friend/fan/journalist, and which role was used to gather what knowledge, also posed ethical problems (Peshkin, 1988), which will be addressed here and in Chapter Five. But the final ethical concern I had to maintain was my neutrality regarding sensitive political issues within the administrations of the two sports I was studying. Because both the Rugby Football League and the British Amateur Rugby League Association were acting as collaborating bodies, I could not be involved in any disputes between them. Likewise, I could not be sidetracked into being seen to support union over league, or professional over amateur, or the status quo over the Super League, whilst actually doing my research - although in writing the thesis these debates are pertinent.

So what is to be investigated, and how? The question(s) of method

It was beginning to be clear what I was to be investigating. I wanted to explore the theoretical issues I had identified, using rugby league and rugby union, and specifically a number

of clubs in a particular locality. In doing this, I hoped to get some data on things like the amateur-professional divide, and the relationship between these sports and social and cultural identity. I was also interested in a grounded theoretical approach. I was aware of some of the theoretical problems regarding the entire research process, about finding the right method and finding out 'the truth' (Bernstein, 1983; Kirk and Miller, 1986). Above all, I wanted my research to be able to adapt to ideas that emerged in the fieldwork (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), as I have discussed in Chapter Two: I wanted my research to be reflexive, and I was aware, as in Chapter One, that the research was as much about me as about the things I was researching.

In any research process, it is essential to choose the best method for both the style of investigation favoured by the researcher, the theories the researcher is exploring, and the data that are required for this exploration. It is a question of best fit: analysing patterns of change in seasonal rainfall requires a different method from exploring the construction of community in rugby league. There were a number of options available to me, caricatured and represented by a quantitative, statistical method of judging opinions and attitudes, or a qualitative, ethnographic method that focussed on individuals and their extended comments and behaviour. The method I chose for my research was dictated by the theoretical framework that underpinned my research, the aims of the research, and some issues of philosophy that would not go away - as well as my preference for a particular style.

The social construction of reality, or how to deal with philosophy

In questioning assumptions taken as truths, and examining the philosophical problems behind the activity of academic research, one is often seen as dabbling in dangerous heresies. In Chapter Two I mention Ludwig Fleck (1935:1979), who identified within a particular subdiscipline of biology a 'thought collective', a constructed community that defined a particular

‘thought style’. To be a member, to be seen as a good academic, one had to conform to patterns of thought, patterns of knowledge, laid down by the thought collective (a similar idea appears in Kuhn’s description of normal science: see Kuhn, 1962). In reading literature (cf. the introduction in Craib, 1992; or the debate involving Layder, 1988; Platt, 1988; Bulmer, 1988) and discussing my own research, I have felt the thought collective of sociology in action around me, warning of navel gazing, or being sidetracked into useless debates over ontology. Questioning what we do in a philosophical sense is, it seems, bad practice.

But ignoring problems will not make them go away. We cannot simply put our heads in the sand like ostriches, believing in the immutability of our preconceptions. The only way to deal with philosophy is to engage in dialogue with it, and respond to its implications, so that our own understandings can emerge better equipped for the task.

It is an unusual paradox within academia that although a) debates surrounding the usefulness and application of the “scientific” method to other fields, b) nihilism and c) postmodern knowledge have existed for much of this century and the latter quarter of the last (e.g. see Hobsbawm, 1987: ch. 10-11; Hollingdale, 1973), research itself still has to conform to tacit rules of truth and validity (Kirk and Miller, 1986). There must be a ‘scientific’ method amidst the postmodern madness. This is because conceptions over what is real, what is testable, what is valid, and what (eventually) is a fact in our society have come directly from an enlightened bourgeois standardisation of knowledge that itself drew upon invented traditions of ‘science’ (this is, of course, the Enlightenment worldview that postmodernists and poststructuralists argue against: see Lechte, 1994). We live in a culture permeated with this Enlightenment view of science (Woolgar, 1989; Latour, 1990), yet as Collins and Pinch (1994: p. 2) argue, “science is so enmeshed in [our culture]... that what actually happens has never been told”.

So I was acutely aware that my research had to conform to certain ideas developed from this Enlightenment philosophy for it to be considered good research, even though sociology and other cultural fields have moved away from much of the crude scientism exemplified by the name 'social science'. I am not a scientist, my research is not scientific research, yet my method has to be seen to be 'scientific': I have to take into account questions of representation, sampling, objectivity, validity and reliability, even if I then argue against them (Hughes, 1990).

This tension between some of my research aims, the method I developed, and the ghost of the scientific method, will be returned to later. However, in introducing this problem there are implications for my entire methodological style: I could either try and be as scientific as possible, mimicking some of the methods commonly associated with science, or I could try and come to a compromise with the demands of the academic machinery and a new paradigm of research that enabled me to explore the construction of community in a way that took on board some of the philosophical objections.

One of the most pressing concerns when I started my research was the implications of this exploration of symbolic construction, social identity and negotiation of meaning. Inherent in my research rationale is an ontological problem. What I am exploring, essentially, is the 'social construction of reality' (Berger and Luckman, 1967), through an understanding that reality as it is understood is merely a product of consensus in shared worldviews (Wittgenstein, 1968; Rorty, 1979). This opens up a massive debate between realism and idealism, and indeed questions of essential quality in ontology can never be resolved by their very nature (e.g. Sprigge, 1985). I had to be careful not to fall into this philosophical trap, of either navel gazing or committing myself to one side or the other. For while it may seem common sensical to accept what we see is what we get, and that an external world exists, there is no solid philosophical proof for it (cf. Sprigge, 1983). At the same time, the discussion on meaning, and the social construction of

reality, potentially implies that there is no external reality, only what we create ourselves (Rorty, 1979).

What this implied for my method was clear: I had to find a way to express this social construction of reality without making any claims about reality itself. I had to be content with exploring how individuals created these social constructions, how they were maintained, and what counted towards the building blocks of this social reality (Berger and Luckman, 1967; Blumer, 1969). I would not and could not say what reality actually was - the existence or non-existence of an external world was not at question, although I had to refer to different constructed realities, including the common sensical one called (erroneously, in a philosophical sense), 'the real world'.

Problems of epistemology: whose knowledge counts, and what makes it valid (or not)

In the language of philosophy, what I was and still am concerned with is epistemology, exploring the language of knowledge and how knowledge is arranged and agreed upon (MacDonald and Petitt, 1981; Chalmers, 1982; Latour, 1987). From the research rationale and the ontological observations made above, it becomes evident that my entire thesis is dominated by a simple philosophical rule, that nonetheless overturns traditional, Enlightenment thinking. Most research assumes that any epistemological problem comes after ontology. In other words, there is something, then we talk about that something (cf. Chalmers, 1982). However, my approach is, as I said above, not really interested in getting into ontology, and where I do approach ontology it is through constructions and meanings that come from the discourse and understanding of the social network. Quite simply, I am suggesting that epistemology comes before ontology (Winch, 1958; Bachelard, 1968; Wittgenstein, 1968). What counts is the language that is used, and how that language is used to imply meaning - in the case of my

research, how that language acts as a text (Thwaite *et al.*, 1994) with which the social reality (the imaginary community, the expressions of masculinity) is constructed.

Methodologically, I had to find some way of co-opting this shift of philosophical emphasis.

These issues all came together when I considered the validity and reliability of my research. Any method I used would have to address the need for my research to be reliable, and hence for my arguments to be valid (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Reliability and credibility are easy to address (Latour, 1987), as they are essentially social constructs of consensus and acceptance by other academics. We are enculturated into what is reliable in terms of methodology, and what is not (Latour, 1987). What makes any research reliable and credible is the acceptance of the rigour of its method, as well as the power of the arguments associated with the choice of that method (Collins, 1985; Collins and Pinch, 1994). One has to show that one's method logically follows the aims of the research, and achieves those aims in the most concise and efficient manner possible, so that one's peers can follow your argument (Latour, 1987).

Reliability is not a problem, as it is a social construct with rules for the researcher to follow. Validity is, however, more difficult to ascertain (Denzin, 1994; Belgrave and Smith, 1995). The first area of confusion is associating validity with truth. One can have a valid argument with false premises, and a false conclusion. Similarly, one may have true premises, but an invalid argument (Ayer, 1959). Hence when we talk about validity in methodology we are really looking at how that method creates a valid thesis. But what makes a method valid in terms of the thesis? How does a particular method imply a validity? In making this definition of validity, one has to rely on ideas of truth correspondence, logic and objectivity that stem from Enlightenment science (Latour, 1990), and as we have seen in Chapter Two and above, there are problems with the philosophical checkboxes that define validity, such as the problem of

representation, the problem of induction, and the problem of proving truth (Chalmers, 1982; Bernstein, 1983).

Again the postmodern Slough of Despond threatens the research. But we cannot turn back like Pliable; instead we must follow Christian's example and face it. Postmodern philosophy suggests that the entire debate over validity and truth is part of a modernist enterprise that deals with metanarratives, and which should be rejected in favour of localised discourses that speak of many truths or no truths at all, opposed to the Truth (e.g. Lyotard, 1984). The relativistic implications of this are too dangerous for many critics to face, as without some kind of ability to make value judgements the academic enterprise fails (Habermas, 1985; Vattimo, 1988). Others suggest that postmodern philosophy shifts the focus of academic debate from logic to rhetoric (Bernstein, 1983; Simons, 1989; Kvale, 1995). Such arguments are, of course, diametrically opposed to the scientism that still prevails in academia, and which supports the rigour and supposed validity of quantitative methods (e.g. Hempel, 1966). Such methods also come under attack for the lack of validity they claim to have (Bloor, 1973), and sociology in particular has been criticised by Collins and Pinch (1994: p. 143) for "physics envy", attempting to be like a science that itself is a social product.

If I was going to work through 'scientific', quantitative methods, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) among others define as the positivistic paradigm, I would have to respond to the objections raised in the Slough of Despond. It is precisely because I did not want to get involved in philosophical debate, and because my research rationale demanded a more field sensitive, epistemological approach, that I rejected early on in the design process the quantitative turn.

The role of the researcher: as reporter, as man

Ethically there is a question over my own role, and my perceived roles within the field. As well as being a researcher, I am a reporter and a fan. Also, a number of the people I wanted to talk to in the field were friends, or friends of friends, or relatives. Clearly this raises a number of methodological problems. Because I am close to the field, because I have access as an insider, it could be argued that this makes my stance subjective and not objective. Where to position oneself in relation to the field is the subject of volumes of debate. There is both a desire not to be too distant from one's field, and a fear of 'going native' (Spradley, 1980; Woods, 1986; Whyte, 1993). Methodologically, I had to balance my role as an insider and the tacit knowledge that revealed, and my position as an academic researcher. The figurationalist dictum of involvement-detachment (Maguire, 1988), while obviously a solution to the dilemma, offers little practical advice.

There was also the problem of who the respondents thought I was, and whether it was ethical or not to use material from situations where I was clearly acting as a reporter or another fan down the pub. In practical terms, the breaks between the researcher, the reporter and the fan were minimal, and some of the material invaluable (Marcus and Fisher, 1986). I had to find some kind of method that allowed me to gather this kind of material so that I was not ethically suspect, which meant I would be open and honest in all formal or semi-formal situations, and that I made people aware of my different roles (see Chapter Five). This issue also relates to that of anonymity, a device that reduces the ethical albatross around my neck.

The value of my knowledge, given my role as a fan and a reporter, and also as a white man (Peshkin, 1988; Phoenix, 1991; Rhodes, 1994), is open to scrutiny. It could be argued that my closeness to the field I had chosen to study would impair my ability to act as an unbiased

observer (Hammersley, 1990). Although I aimed to do my best to keep some academic sense of what was going on around me, I had to accept that I would be intimately connected to the field. Yet obviously, I have achieved some kind of distance, through university and enculturation into the academic language. Hence this intimateness can be an advantage, as it enables one to find out how tacit knowledge creates these constructions and symbols that are at the heart of my theoretical framework (Peshkin, 1988; Stanley, 1990). The question of whether I could successfully come back out of the field and produce a reliable thesis is answered by the thesis itself.

Similarly, I am a white man theorising about (mainly) white men. The complexity of men trying to theorise about something which they are a part of (such as expressions of masculinity) has been on the whole overlooked (though see Hearn and Morgan, 1990; Jackson, 1990; Messner, 1990b). Again, although perhaps my intimacy with the worldview of white, working class men means my research becomes reflexive (Bourdieu, 1990), reflexivity is no bad thing: it means access into the world of these white, working class men becomes easier. One cannot avoid the fact, as I suggested in Chapter One, that as a researcher I am involved and shaped by my own research (Bourdieu, 1990). Of course I am not suggesting a research thesis should resemble a self-confessional, but hiding the issue because one sees philosophical problems with fitting reflexivity in with a 'scientific' method does not solve anything.

My experience in the field when dealing with non-whites and women will be discussed in Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine: the problem of my own background discussed here resulted in some similarities - and some differences - to the idea of reflexivity and intimacy.

Qualitative methods and naturalistic inquiry

It was clear that my method had to take into account these issues. My research aims involved exploring ideas that would, it seemed, remain untouched by quantitative attitude surveys. And there were, as I had established, a number of intractable problems in adherence to scientism - particularly when the nature of the research tended towards the interpretive and exploration of meaning, as mine did. From this it seemed the best way forward for my research, the best methods I could employ, were qualitative ones (Denzin, 1978; Miles and Huberman, 1984). Not only did such methods enable me to do what I wanted most efficiently, they sat easier with the Kuhnian conception of a new paradigm of knowledge gathering: the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba, 1990).

The naturalistic paradigm is hard to define. Following Kuhn (1962) it is suggested that the normal science exemplified by what the naturalists term 'positivism' (a reading of the philosophy of science concomitant with public perceptions of how science operates, such as Hempel, 1966; Hawking, 1988) is being challenged by a new paradigm which is incommensurable with the old one. In essence, academic research is, according to the naturalists (e.g. Guba, 1990), in a Kuhnian revolution.

This new paradigm suggests an emphasis on understanding, perception and the demands of the field (Ely, 1991). It supports a qualitative approach with less insistence on the objective stance that has, as I have shown, a number of philosophical problems. It suggests researchers have to learn from the field, to listen and try to understand. On a theoretical level, it eschews traditional hypothetico-deductive models for a more grounded theoretical approach of theory development (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Lincoln and Guba claim that it is "precisely because the matter is so involved that it is not possible to provide a simple definition" (1985: p. 8). Ely

(1991) identifies the problem as one of labelling. Indeed, Guba and Lincoln (1989) have gone on to identify the paradigm as 'constructivism research'. However, the label is really irrelevant (Lofland and Lofland, 1984).

What this entailed, what actual methods it implied, and what I actually did, is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Four

‘The hard yakka’: doing the research

‘So what are yer telling me - that you get paid to watch rugby?’

A friend

Whenever I have met up with old friends and they have asked me what I have been doing for the past few years I have always struggled to define - in a soundbite - the nature of my research. The rumour quickly spread and came back to me that I was doing a PhD on rugby league, which elicited many comments such as the one expressed above. In a sense this was my own doing: not only did I struggle to elaborate my research rationale without recourse to sociological jargonese, but I also encouraged this image of me somehow doing what most people only dream of - combining their work with pleasure.

The question of articulation is the essence of this chapter. What have I done? The struggle to elaborate has to end here, as one’s method is the crux of an entire research project. It explains the source of one’s data, the basis of one’s theorising, and theoretically provides a blueprint for the reader to recreate the research - either as a thought experiment, or out in the field itself. The method, and the presentation of the method, is crucial in assessing the reliability of the research, and whether the research is judged to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (Hammersley, 1992; Lincoln and Guba, 1985), even if validity is philosophically untenable (see Chapter Three). But there is another, related question, which returns to the issue of ethics and consent raised in Chapter Three. I had to articulate my purpose and my research aims in a way that the people in the field could understand, so that they could judge whether or not to accept me and my methodological intentions.

This chapter begins with a discussion on qualitative methods and my application of them in defining my own method, and goes on to explain how I started and gained access. It then describes what approaches I used - what I actually did - and highlights possible problems and solutions to those problems in each individual method. These issues are brought together to discuss the reliability of the research and how I feel the 'credibility' (Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of my research has been achieved. In doing so I explain and elaborate how the research evolved using a number of other methodological tools which triangulate the research. Finally, I describe how I have analysed my material collected in the field.

The principles of qualitative research

The relationship between the naturalistic paradigm and qualitative methods is not a necessary one. Miles and Huberman (1984) show, among others, that qualitative methods are used by a wide range of researchers, some of whom work inside what the naturalists call the positivistic paradigm. For instance, McCall and Simmons (1969) argue that participant-observation, a qualitative method favoured by naturalists, employs the concepts, propositions and empirical generalisations of scientific theory.

Nevertheless, my research project inevitably favoured a qualitative method. Not only did I prefer a grounded theoretical approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), but the type of material I was looking to find for my theoretical purposes favoured both research in the style of the naturalist paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Reason and Rowan, 1981), and a qualitative method of data collection.

So, if labels are really necessary, my research is qualitative. As Ely (1991) claims, qualitative research is defined by the particular methods used, which themselves come from and define (in a general sense) ethnography: participant-observation and interviewing (Wolf, 1979).

Another way of defining qualitative research is to analyse what other qualitative researchers say about their work. Sherman and Webb (1988) attempt this and come to the conclusion that

'Qualitative implies a direct concern with experience as it is felt or undergone... Qualitative research, then, has the aim of understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it.' (Sherman and Webb, 1988:p. 7)

This encapsulates neatly what I hoped to do. It also describes the motive and the method of cultural fieldwork that has come to be known as ethnography (Spradley, 1980; Werner and Schoepfle, 1987; Thomas, 1993): again, ethnography is central to the naturalistic paradigm (Ely, 1991). Indeed, there is considerable overlap and confusion in some of the literature between qualitative research, ethnography, and naturalism (eg see Miles and Huberman, 1994: pp 5-9), a problem which I was guilty of myself.

What I planned to do, therefore, was an ethnography of the field identified in the previous chapter, using the qualitative methods that are traditionally associated with such an enterprise, namely observation (Whyte, 1993) and extensive interviewing (Wolf, 1979), along with keeping a journal of my thoughts and reflections (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Ely, 1991; Wolcott, 1994).

There are problems with this kind of qualitative naturalistic approach. First of all, 'in any social setting it is impossible to observe or interview everyone and everything' (Burgess, 1982). Simple time limits and economic costs prevent a researcher exploring every avenue. If this is the case, then a question mark can be placed over the aim of the research, which is to generate theory and draw a coherent picture of a particular field. In other words, in the language of positivism, the research validity is questioned.

I am aware I have to make concessions towards the practicalities of context. Yet it is precisely this awareness of my own position, my own needs, and my own limits, which is

unproblematised in positivist research. The research is not to be generalised and extrapolated and carved in stone: it is an explanation of the field brought about by being responsive to the field, understanding the field, and learning from the field (Ely, 1991).

My initial plan - of doing an ethnography incorporating in depth interviews (Spradley, 1979; McCracken, 1988) and participant-observation (Spradley, 1980; Whyte, 1993) - could also be questioned in terms of its reliability. It had to be reliable data I was collecting, and the process had to be seen to take into account problems associated with ethnography and interviews raised elsewhere in this chapter. This was an issue of triangulation, of making sure what I was collecting was not erroneous in any sense (Mathison, 1988; Fetterman, 1989). Also, since I claimed to be a naturalist, developing grounded theory, I had to be flexible enough to adapt and change my method as my research progressed (Strauss, 1995). What these problems implied was that an ethnography was on the one hand too intimate and produced lots of descriptive data but not enough explanation, and on the other my methods did not give me enough to work on. As I will show, what I planned initially and what I did altered as the research progressed, and the issue of reliability and triangulation was addressed by a multimethod approach (Brewer and Hunter, 1989) that incorporated different ways of approaching the field.

Gaining access

I was ready to start my research. Getting started in the field meant getting access to the people and places I intended to incorporate in my fieldwork. In doing this I used the promise of anonymity as a device in securing co-operation. As I discussed in Chapter Three, this proved invaluable in opening doors and reassuring people of my trustworthiness. Establishing trust was crucial to getting access. Displaying my intentions, offering anonymity and keeping the respondents informed of the research was the approach I followed. It was ethically sound,

honest, and allowed the respondents some control over their consent to take part in the research (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Hence some people did refuse me interviews - and I did not and could not (in keeping consistent with an ethical code) badger them to change their minds. The proactive nature of the research was emphasised at this stage, as respondents were more likely to allow access if they knew they were not being abused by some cold, objective academic.

In practice, my closeness to their experiences served as a useful key to unlocking any barriers to access. As a fan with some prior knowledge of both codes, and a background that could be emphasised either way, I ingratiated myself into the field (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Whyte, 1993). This perhaps may be questionable ethically, as I admit I was economical with the truth on occasions. For instance, I did not tell the members of the amateur rugby league club I had a degree from a 'posh' university: instead I chatted about team selections for Great Britain and so on. Likewise, I neglected to tell people at the rugby union club I was a reporter for a rugby league paper. Where possible I was honest over what my research was about, and what I wanted, but in putting people at ease and gaining acceptance and access it was necessary to put on a front - to act a role acceptable to them, and tell them only the relevant aspects of my own history. This was a device in achieving access and establishing acceptance in the field, so that I could do my research without hindrance. The deception was minor and did not alter any part of the thesis, and overall was minimalised by my honesty and ethical responsibilities elsewhere.

What I did tell them was that I was a researcher at Leeds Metropolitan University, studying for a PhD, interested in exploring the relationship between these games and the values and culture of those involved in playing, watching and supporting them. I gave each contact the name of my director of studies, my phone number, and a copy of an abridged version of my research registration form. It could be argued that an abridged version withholds some information of intent, but my rationale for this approach was that such a report was easier to

understand - and besides, the contact was only interested in what I was doing and what I wanted, not in a debate over the formation of an imaginary community following Cohen (1985). Displaying my credentials was essential ethically, and also apprised the respondents of the intent of my research.

Access into the clubs and the networks surrounding them was achieved through a variety of methods. Through family and friends I already had access to the junior club, and one of these served as a gatekeeper (Ely, 1991) through which I could act in arranging access and interviews. Networking with people there and contacting a committee member through one of the collaborating bodies, I was able to get access to the amateur rugby league club. As a reporter I knew other people in the field, and I had already made informal contact with someone at the professional club who was in a position to act as a gatekeeper. When this person left, it was a simple matter of meeting his replacement. The added weight of the collaborating bodies found me other useful contacts. Their backing opened doors and gave me access to some places and people I would not have otherwise reached. A gatekeeper at the rugby union club was fortuitously found by a contact at the Rugby Football League, who was a good friend of this person. To make sure of matters I accessed the club through another gatekeeper as well through sending an introductory letter explaining my purpose. As the research progressed I found it useful to use a similar strategy of contacting people without using the original gatekeepers, which allowed me to explore different views and parts of the field (Spradley, 1980).

My *a priori* knowledge of the universe under examination allowed me to undertake non-probabilistic sampling, where I selected respondents by virtue of their status or previous experiences which endow them with special knowledge. This is what Burgess (1982) calls 'judgement sampling'. A network of respondents was gathered through the gatekeepers, interaction with my own observations/experience and 'snowball sampling' (Plant, 1975;

Hoffman, 1980; West, 1980), where contacts suggest other contacts. This raised questions of who was or was not being heard: hence my concern at finding other levels of entry and other contacts through my experience of the fieldwork. This also allowed me to expand and develop the fieldwork when necessary in response to grounded theory developments - the women's rugby league club was a perfect example of an expansion of the fieldwork. Access here was negotiated through the governing body, which failed to provide a result, and a contact at the professional club who pointed me successfully towards one of the women's club members. Further interviews were done where necessary, following similar methods of access.

Ethnography? No, ethnographic approaches...

I started my research on the assumption that I was doing an ethnography, using participant-observation (Spradley, 1980; Whyte, 1993) to get inside the life of the field I was studying, so that I would understand its insider knowledge and structures (Whyte, 1993). Ethnography is a term that has come to us from cultural anthropology. As Spradley (1979) claims, it is the work of describing a culture using the principle of learning from the field. Ely (1991) and Werner and Schoepfle (1987) describe ethnography as a specific academic field that attempts to describe the acquired, tacit knowledge of a culture, the perceptions and interpretive methods of that culture, and its social behaviour (cf. the anthropology of Levi-Strauss, 1978).

This definition of ethnography suited both my research aims and the theoretical framework I was developing through grounded theory. One can also see why naturalist paradigm researchers favour ethnography, as it is (theoretically) sensitive to the field and develops with the field. According to Agar (1980, 1986), ethnography is a particular style of research that uses anthropological methods such as participant-observation and long, unstructured interviews to construct a story about a particular social group or culture. Stanley

(1990) stresses the importance of ethnography in understanding and interpreting, and suggests - following the naturalistic paradigm - that the aim of ethnography is not to elaborate on universal truths, but on localised ones.

As stated, ethnography has come under criticism from theorists and devotees of more rigorous, scientific methods. It has been argued that ethnography is the latest example of the academic ego, which assumes one can simply live amongst a strange culture and learn its ways due to one's white, middle class, patriarchal training. It is, as Clough (1992) argues, a method that relies on an unattainable image of the researcher as a disinterested, objective adjudicator, and a voice that is aloof, 'neutral' but undoubtedly masculine. It is the white man with pith helmet mentioned in Chapter Two. Hammersley (1990) queries ethnography's theoretical weakness and accuses it of being unexplanatory, and questions the value of so much description. It can also be argued that the method of ethnography - and participant-observation - is flawed as what it claims to do (tell the complete picture of a particular set) is impossible to achieve by these methods (Eglin, 1976). It is a case of ethnographers dismissing the scientific method but claiming to be scientific, and in doing so failing to tell the entire story. It is a question of how much needs to be observed before one can claim to know what is happening - theoretically, one needs to observe all possible permutations of a problem before one can infer an explanation (cf. the raven paradox: Lipton, 1991). Hence ethnography is criticised for not telling the whole story, only a story biased by the observer's own values. It is this that has led Porter (1993) to suggest that ethnography has to ground itself in critical realism as developed by Roy Bhaskar (1989), to maintain a semblance of scientific rigour.

The naturalistic paradigm offers another solution (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Ely, 1991). Ethnography, according to Ely (1991), is extremely subjective, and the good ethnographer learns how to be sensitive towards and sensitised to the field. Writing good ethnography becomes the

crucial issue according to Van Maanen (1988), so that the whole story can be told, or rather the story that is relevant to the aims of the research. In doing this, one avoids the syndrome of the white man in the pith helmet. Ethnography, claim Ely (1991) and Fetterman (1989), is also a liberating method for the researched, who can take a more active role in deciding the course of the research: this, they argue, gives the researcher a subjective, more passive role, contrary to Clough's (1992) argument. The naturalistic paradigm is incommensurable (Kuhn, 1962) with that of the positivists; hence naturalistic ethnography is about feeling, understanding and interpretation, and criticisms about not observing everything become mute. That is a judgemental argument of validity relevant only to scientific research - the naturalists dealt with the philosophy and rejected positivist adherence to unachievable standards of epistemology at the beginning (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: ch. 1).

My research, following Spradley (1980), started out as a standard ethnography. That is, I realised that pragmatism showed ethnography to be the right method for my research. It allowed me to generate the data I needed for the theoretical framework. It best suited my research aims, which were to explore constructions and meaning in a particular setting. And it dovetailed conveniently with the ideas of grounded theory - ethnography seemed ideal for working through new ideas. However, I was also acutely aware of the demands of the research process, the academic rigour required, and my own ethnocentric education. I was not entering the field without any judgemental values, I was not going, to quote Star Trek's Captain Picard, "to see what's out there". I had a purpose, my background and education, and my theoretical framework. So it would be best, as I realised, to follow Wolcott (1982) and state instead that I was going to draw upon ethnographic approaches in qualitative research.

In other words, I was not going into the field to spend three years living the life of a rugby player to see if I could learn anything. I was going to use my own experiences,

ethnographic methods such as qualitative questioning, informal conversations, observation and participation in some theory-relevant elements of the life of the field, to build up a picture informed by the theoretical framework. As the research progressed the distinction between my own insider knowledge and twenty-plus years of watching, playing and writing about rugby league (and, to a lesser extent, rugby union), the fieldwork of observation, participation and conversation, the theory developed from literature, and the theory developed from suggestions from the fieldwork, was blurred. Theory informed questions which informed observation which informed theory which informed observation which informed questions which informed theory... and so on. In essence, I was combining grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) with an on-going literature analysis to create a symbiotic relationship between method and theory. This seemed to be the most honest and credible way of doing my research (and, probably, the actual way most research is undertaken: see Collins, 1985; Latour, 1987). At no time was I solely a data collector, or solely an analyst of journal papers, or solely a theorist.

To begin with, after I had achieved access to the clubs mentioned in Chapter Three, I had to establish a working relationship with the people there. Through gatekeepers and first contacts I made sure my aims were clear and that they knew I did not need their active participation apart from the interviews. I had to establish my acceptance and gain their trust (cf. Chapter Three). This I did by chatting informally at length with people in the clubs, mentioning my desire to “hang around and just join in”, or to “watch what goes on at -”. The abundance of television documentaries that use the technique popularised as ‘fly-on-the-wall’ helped establish my role as an observer, and my desire to participate in some activities such as social nights and training was in itself a positive way of earning trust and respect. Apart from the gatekeepers and interviewees, I was seen as just another fan or ‘hanger-on’ by others in the ethnography, and I was treated as such. My knowledge of both games, and my background in them, was decisive in

removing the label of 'academic researcher' and establishing a more equal, natural relationship with people in the field (Ely, 1991).

In doing this qualitative research using an ethnographic approach, I concentrated solely on the clubs I accessed, with the exception of work done through my role as a reporter and my role as a fan at big events such as the Australian rugby league tour in 1994. At the clubs I identified the important sites where social interaction occurred: these were the changing room, the bar or pub or clubhouse, the gym, the training pitch, the touchline, the match pitch, the stand, the terraces, the ground and the office or committee meeting room, depending on the club involved. In addition, it was necessary to expand the ethnography to include the crucial site of interaction in the social networks of rugby league in the field: the pubs of the district I named Sudthorpe. Having identified these places the legwork of actually going to them regularly began in the summer of 1994. I spent on average two nights a week plus some time during the weekend (at a match) visiting clubs and pubs, varying the days between training and non-training nights, and following a schedule that cycled between the different individual clubs so that I visited them at least once a fortnight. This schedule was not set in any way, and altered as ideas and contacts emerged, as my own life intervened, and as interviews began to be arranged. Also, as I describe elsewhere in this chapter, as the research progressed the ethnographic approach stopped being the crucial aspect of the research, and I devoted more time to other methods. Nevertheless, the ethnographic approach was crucial in setting up the broad picture and in pointing me along new avenues of method and theory. In observing and listening to what people said (Ely, 1991), I gathered data that informed further data collection, and provided the basis of my understanding.

In practice at first I merely watched and listened (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983), and did not take notes. I wanted to get a feeling about the field I was studying. This was, I suppose,

my pilot study (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973), and although I did write things down, they were in loose form and more recollective than the later notes, except where I had heard quotable quotes. Later on, after the Christmas of 1994, I was more efficient in keeping track of my ethnography. I relied on my good memory and (in emergency) a small notepad in my pocket, and wrote up shorthand notes immediately after I returned from a field trip in my logbook (Bogden and Biklen, 1982). This book also served as a diary of my thoughts and ideas and feelings (Ely, 1991; Wolcott, 1994), as well as a place where I mapped out the research, recorded scraps of literature and referenced books I had read. It was not a formal, neat record with clearly delineated passages of ethnographic notes, self reflection and academic writing: rather, it was a seemingly chaotic scribble of hieroglyphics that nonetheless I was easy with (Wolcott, 1994). It served me best: I could see order amidst the chaos, and that pragmatic usefulness is the best argument one can use. I continued the ethnographic approach until the end of 1995: this gave me a season and a bit plus pre-season preparation for the initial clubs (Sudthorpe RLFC, Chemicals ARLFC, Netherborough RUFC and the Boys' Club) and time to work with the women's amateur rugby league club and follow the new trails of the pub culture and my role as a reporter. In total I filled two books with my shorthand notes, which amounts to approximately two hundred and forty sides of A4 paper. In addition, I relied on memory, experience and working papers to provide other avenues of data storage.

Ask no questions, get no answers

What turned out to be the most important form of data collection in the research process was the recording of the spoken word expressing feeling and meaning. Given the theoretical framework and research aims discussed in Chapter Two this is perhaps not too surprising. Symbolic meaning and the construction of identity and community, and social interaction,

depend on communication. I was interested in how meaning was expressed and negotiated, and as I describe in Chapter Two, ideas about language and meaning (Bloor, 1983) run through this entire thesis.

My ethnographic method evolved to include both the recording of informal snippets of conversation and comment, such as words shouted at a match or heard in a pub conversation as part of the ethnography, to more formalised interviews. Structured interviews with set questions and closed answers did not suit my research, and the naturalist paradigm suggests anyway that all we as researchers can do is allow the field to talk for itself: we can provide only an interpretive role (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It is suggested that formally structured interviews do not allow the respondent a free voice, and hence the researcher biases the interview and dictates responses (Ely, 1991) based on preconceptions and prejudices brought into the field (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In other words, the structured interview provides only a partial view of the field, or at worst portrays the field inaccurately (Spradley, 1979). Instead it is argued by Ely (1991) and Scheurich (1995) that interviews should be unstructured and informal, so that the respondent can say what they want uncluttered by the interviewer's theoretical baggage.

However, the problem with unstructured interviews is that they are precisely that: unstructured. I was not a researcher dipping into the maelstrom of life to see what was there: my purpose was to produce a piece of research with specific theoretical aims, which did not coincide with the purposes of people in the field (Headland *et al.*, 1990). In addition, this gave rise to the question of the difference between the academic language and the language of the field: we cannot agree between ourselves over meaning, so how does one interpret the meaning of the language of the field?

One has to be pragmatic and realistic of our aims and expectations. On the one hand, one must be aware of the uncertainty of interpretation (Quine, 1960), but one must also realise that

the entire research process is about making credible interpretations. Hence, although my interviews were part of a naturalistic ethnography (Douglas, 1984), they still had some kind of structure informed by my theoretical framework and my research aims (Spradley, 1979). And by using observation, by reviewing the literature in the field, one can become aware of the concepts and issues relevant to the discourse in the field (Glancy, 1986). Hence, although I allowed respondents to develop the interview, and did not structure questions so that their freedom in responding in new ways was restricted, I made sure topics relevant to my preconceived aims and categories were covered (Spradley, 1979).

Let me make this clear. I prepared before each interview a list or schedule (McCracken, 1988) of topics I wanted to address, a list that was designed using my aims and previous fieldwork, so that I could develop new ideas and theories. Pertinent to the entire research process were the concepts of belonging and of male identity, so I made sure in front of me during every interview was some indication of their importance. Also, I needed to know where they fitted in the social networks, and where they had come from. I was also, initially, concerned with what they felt about the other code. So I would have a schedule that looked something like this:

Born where background

Family - when first start?

Career - plans

BELONGING

WHY PLAY/SUPPORT? (IDENTITY)

club related to...

What is it about the game?

Other code opinion

Attitude: to Super League, to one game, to defence of tradition

Specific respondents would be asked different questions, but central themes were always covered. This semi-structure, and in particular the formal opening (which was always “where were you born?”) put respondents at ease. For them, an interview is a set of questions which they have agreed to give answers to. They made time for me under this assumption, and following Spradley (1979), I felt they would become frustrated if they thought I was there for a seemingly aimless chat.

Wolf (1979) and McCracken (1988) both suggest that the crucial skill in interviewing is to listen, so that one can respond to the respondent. In semi-structured interviewing this skill is essential, as it is ‘the vehicle of effective conversation’ (Wolf, 1979). In interviewing, I felt I was a conductor, arranging the flow of the conversation to pick up important points, expand them and move on from dead ends or awkward silences. Listening was vital, providing the chance for in situ interpretation and data collection (Ely, 1991). Also, this active listening showed the respondents I was interested in what they were saying (Douglas, 1984), and I was not just trying to get another job done. By making respondents at ease, interviews become potentially richer in data: the interview becomes in-depth where the immediate issue is the respondent’s message, not what question comes next.

I was also aware in interviewing of the circumstances of the interview (Spradley, 1979), where and why it was happening, and what happened before and after it, which was on a number of occasions more illuminating than the ‘official’ interview (though for ethical reasons this was not reported, only used to shape further fieldwork).

In the interview itself I tried not to ask leading questions, or trick the respondents in any way. I was also aware of my own role, and what I said. The semi-structured in-depth interview has a format of informed open-endedness (Spradley, 1979). I made sure the dialogue was

informal and relaxed - this not only reassured the respondents, but on the first few occasions helped my own nerves. This relaxed atmosphere was crucial in getting respondents to talk, and following Wolf (1979) I used a number of techniques to get respondents to talk, such as creating hypothetical situations, referring to debates and discourse in the trade press or gossip, recapitulating points, speaking in understandable but not patronising terms. Also, I used tricks to help the dialogue flow: pauses, grunts of interest/understanding, repetition, smiles and conspiratorial nods of agreement (Wolf, 1979).

Who I interviewed was determined initially by the field defined in chapter three: supporters, administrators and players at the clubs. I identified suitable interviewees through my fieldwork, through gatekeepers and through judgement sampling (Burgess, 1982), then met respondents face to face to arrange interviews at suitable locations and times. Other respondents were identified away from the four clubs who could give me suitable data for my thesis, and these were contacted as described at the start of this chapter. In total I interviewed formally using a semi-structured method fifty nine respondents, a cross section of people involved in the clubs and other relevant sources (see Appendix Two for list). Anonymity guaranteed access for these interviews. Because of their semi-structured nature, they lasted a varied range of times, from ten minutes to an hour, though the average time was around the thirty minute mark. In addition, some of the respondents who were interviewed at the start of the research in the summer of 1994 were returned to as the theoretical framework was developed and asked specific questions relating to new theory or new information from the field (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Initially I used a tape recorder at the interviews, which allowed me to concentrate on what was being said instead of writing notes. However, as I progressed and the enormity of the fieldwork told, I resorted to notes during and immediately after the interviews. It is argued that a taped interview may close avenues of investigation as it makes the interview more formal (Ely,

1991) - I did not find this. My non-taped interviews took place when I was more experienced and used to the research process.

Ensuring reliability: expanding the field, expanding the questions, expanding method

It may already be evident that this in itself had limitations and problems over reliability. The semi-structured interviews and the ethnography gave me invaluable insights into the games of rugby league and rugby union, and the people who were involved in the social networks around them, but ethnographic methods alone were problematic. The criticisms of ethnography discussed were countered by my reliance on grounded theory and the tenets of the naturalist paradigm: I was not claiming to produce a scientifically valid universal truth supported by a scientific method. I was telling a particular story in an attempt to provide an explanatory account of issues in the field through recourse to my theoretical framework.

Nevertheless, I realised I had to do more to address the question of the reliability of my findings. I had to improve on and expand my method, so that I could be sure I had not missed or ignored potential 'voices'. Because of the nature of the naturalist paradigm and qualitative research in general, there is a tendency to assume reliability is not an issue. However, as Lincoln (1995) argues, naturalist research has to be especially vigilant in defining standards of reliability and credibility. Hence, in my research methodology I was concerned in triangulating my data from the field (Mathison, 1988; Fetterman, 1989) so that I could feel confident my data (and therefore my thesis and theory) was reliable and credible.

By triangulation I mean I had to look towards other ways of data collection which would provide a comparable but alternative view of the field to the initial research, which would inform and improve reliability by cross-comparison and mutual agreement. In doing this I was not saying my ethnographic approach and my semi-structured interviews were bad or wrong; I was

merely acting to make that research more reliable by supporting the findings. To do this I adopted a pragmatic, multimethod approach suggested by Brewer and Hunter (1989) among others, who argue that good, reliable research is achieved through varying the method of data collection so that triangulation follows. Although I did not work through a multimethod approach as thorough as they suggest, I was inspired by this sensible caution and check of reliability to expand my own method. I had to use what was available, and what was best, to triangulate my findings.

One of the ways to triangulation has already been broached: my own experiences as a fan and reporter and player were invaluable in providing tacit knowledge and insider understandings of both codes of rugby. I drew upon this self-reflection both to analyse and predict happenings in the field, but also to support findings in the thesis which pertained to the development of the theoretical framework. Grounded theory also triangulated as it was worked through from field to theory back to field, as it was a gradual analysis that triangulated the method to provide a synthesis (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) of ideas.

I also expanded my method to include a content analysis of secondary sources produced within the field. These included fanzines, the trade press, quality magazines, newspapers, books and other related media sources such as television programmes. This content analysis was undertaken using the same theoretical framework and method of the ethnographic approach, where relevant material was collected and noted. This provided another point of access to the discourses around meaning and the history of the games. Working with these secondary sources opened up further methodological styles, concerned with studying the style and semiotics of the related media (Berger, 1972; Thwaite *et al.*, 1994), and with the historical background to the two games and the cultures surrounding them (Abrams, 1982). In doing this, I negotiated access to archival sources both at the Rugby Football League and in private collections to help

triangulate and make reliable my own historical analysis, and I maintained regular contact with an expert in this field. Other methodological styles in this expansion of my approach included a more proactive literature search to develop the theoretical framework and the synthesis of ideas, and an elaboration of the ethnographic approach to triangulate issues from these methods. Finally, I used the findings of related research I undertook (Long *et al.*, 1995) which included a statistical analysis of attitudes alongside qualitative methods to triangulate parts of this thesis (in particular Chapter Eight).

My method was open ended, and its development evolved according to the demands of the research and the need to make the thesis reliable and credible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Lincoln, 1995).

Analysing and writing

The end result of my method of data collection was a set of raw data that consisted of notes from interviews, notes from ethnography and quotes and references from other sources such as books, magazines, newspapers and journals. All this had to be analysed in some way. Analysis is often left undescribed in research reports, yet it is - to paraphrase an Australian rugby league expression - 'the hard yakka you put in for the end thesis'. Yet through my style of research, the distinction between collection and analysis was not clearly defined (Lofland, 1971). Clearly there was some kind of selective process going on all the time as through taking notes (even from taped interviews) I was representing the world in packages of useful material (Strauss, 1987). Notes are only a reflection of reality - this is a semantic definition as well as an inescapable consequence of the problem of representation (Collins, 1985, and Chapter Three).

In taking notes, in asking specific theory related questions pertaining to subsets of the respondent's world and listening to taped interviews and writing representations of these, I was

constantly analysing *in situ*. For the ethnographic material and the secondary sources and so on I did not list EVERYTHING I read or saw or heard or thought. Instead I was flagging data that was related to theory, and pertinent to further research, as I worked through the field. That is another truism: one does not (and cannot) write down or listen without prejudice, whatever the George Michael record says. Instead I followed a process of analysis using a set of inter-related ideas that shaped the research and guided me to what was or was not relevant. In other words, the breakdown of the data gathered from the field has occurred prior to the finish of the fieldwork. For instance, the semi-structured interviews in themselves allowed me to be selective, and gave me the opportunity to flag notes with analytical categories (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Gubrium, 1985; Strauss, 1987) as I went on.

What this allowed me to do, in practical terms, was to use the fieldwork to inform theory and further fieldwork, so that what I have achieved in this thesis is a synthesis of ideas, not an analysis of data, through testing theory developed and grounded within the fieldwork and previous theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987).

This raises the question of how I knew what was important, and how I managed to sort through the reams of data packages (essentially the notes) so that I could tell this story (Wolcott, 1994).

Analysis is influenced by theory. That was the purpose of my research, to interpret the world (or part of the world known as the field) in a way I had chosen through the influence of both the field itself and the theoretical framework. What this meant was that there were a number of fields or categories (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Gubrium, 1985; Strauss, 1987) into which I could drop data. I found it convenient in my own logical reasoning to visualise these categories as separate filing cabinets, clearly marked, with separate drawers for subcategories of related 'files' of data. These filing cabinet categories were created either by

a] the initial rationale (theory influenced categories)

or, as the fieldwork progressed

b] the fieldwork itself, through the process of continual analysis and development of grounded theory (field influenced categories).

Both types informed, and were informed by, the theoretical framework. The major categories were, with some of the related subcategories that proved relevant to the thesis: gender identity (expressions of masculinity, women in rugby, violence, masculinity as cultural marker, tension, northern man, legitimation), cultural identity (invented traditions, cultural northern-ness, northern man as working class, class defining sport, class tension, black perspectives: racism, tension in who counts), belonging (community spirit, social networks, the imagined-ness, the imaginary community, identity with the community, legitimisation of community, maintenance of boundaries:insider/outsider, tensions within, historicalness), rugby politics (game as spectacle, game as sport, professionalism, amateurs in pro-game, ampro divide, why I hate that lot), club life (professionalisation, social life, the club, the changing room, the match, training, hierarchy, expression of belonging, locality) and history (club histories, community history, the Split, the use and abuse of history, nostalgia).

As can be seen, many of these subcategories overlapped - I did not intend them to be carved in stone or rigorously applied. The other chapters of the thesis show that many of these issues did not come out in a significant way from the field or in the writing of the thesis. But this office of filing cabinets was a suitable place to start collating and sorting my data. They were theory influenced flags (Strauss, 1987) that helped me keep track of data and the connections between different parts of the field. Elements of my notes fitted in a number of categories: other points did not sit easy anywhere. In the end it was my responsibility to read what I had and interpret it.

So I had an office of categories, related to one another in my mind's eye by strings, so that I could follow ideas and stories from cabinet to cabinet, or file to file. In technical terms I had a web of inter-related categories with data at the interstices (Miles and Huberman, 1984). From this I could begin to write, following the strings and picking up files where I had dropped them when they were needed to elaborate a point or support an argument.

There is computer software available that does this for the researcher, but as I had already analysed in the process of recording I felt I had already done most of the "hard yakka". Instead I physically flagged my notes with hieroglyphics representing subcategories and gave each package a reference number. I did this using my original notes which are on A4 sized paper, to produce a physical representation of the web. Using the reference numbers and hieroglyphics I then began to 'paste' a narrative together, synthesising my analysis by making further loose notes of connections between parts of the physical entity that was my fieldwork (the logbook and the tapes and the references). This is what is known as the 'paste and paper method'. This then allowed me to elaborate and write my thesis.

In writing this thesis I felt it was important to adopt a particular style of reporting and academic rigour which nevertheless avoided much of the dull, oblique artificial neutrality and disinterestedness that pervades much academic writing (Becker, 1986). As a piece of research influenced by the naturalist paradigm, I could do no less, as writing good, rich material is central to naturalism (Wolcott, 1994). I was also aware, as a qualitative researcher, I had to be more aware of how I organised my arguments, developed my theory and supported and defended my method (Lofland, 1974). Finally, I was concerned the structure and style of the thesis presented these arguments in a coherent and intelligent manner, that was also entertaining to the reader.

Analysis

Chapter Five

Amateurs and professionals

'When we started telling stories we gave our lives a new dimension: the dimension of meaning - apprehension - comprehension.'

Ben Okri (1996)

Whatever the researcher presents within this thesis, it must be realised that the people and places that have generated the theory are real, in the common sense usage of the word. They existed and lived before the researcher entered their lives, and their life carries on as I sit at the word processor turning their experiences into examples in an academic story (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Ely, 1991). This is perhaps a truism often understated, that the field has a life of its own with its own concerns. The rugby field, like any sports field, is dominated by the cyclical nature of a sporting season, so it is inevitable that the forms of life it shows follow this cycle.

As I interacted with the field the fine distinction between researcher and researched was blurred (Whyte, 1993). Like Whyte, the result of participant-observation was to become in some sense a part of the field, and the challenge set by Elias (1978) to be both near and far to the focus of the research was at times hard to live up to: more so because of my insiders' familiarity with the code of rugby league, and my job as a reporter for a rugby league paper. The hat I wore was not obvious to me - nor was it obvious to those I spoke to, but the hat became irrelevant once it was clear I was a 'friend'.

This chapter introduces the four clubs around which most of the research was done, and uses ethnographic work to build up a picture of the life of these clubs in various situations. The self reflexivity inherent in this is deliberately played on, and explored in some detail. I deal with

the clubs using their language where possible. The immodest attempt to distil the lives of these clubs into brief ethnographic narrative is open to much criticism (Hammersley, 1990). The problem of representation states that any attempt to represent data such as observed 'truths' is flawed by our inability to make those representations without recourse to *a priori* theory or tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1969, 1973; Collins, 1985). In other words, what we choose to represent and how we represent it is essentially theory laden and underdetermined. Any gathering of observed data is weakened in terms of validity through this and the related problem of induction: my narrative will always be open to quite valid criticism on the grounds more observations could be done. Yet ethnography is not an attempt to show how the field operates and behaves in minute anthropological detail (Ely, 1991), so that statements can be made that have the value of validity (Kirk and Miller, 1986). Ethnography is the practice of writing and describing in reliable detail (Ely, 1991) relevant loci in a particular network as seen through the eyes of the researcher. It is an attempt to make the implicit explicit (Agar, 1986).

Hence this chapter is a repository of the tacit knowledge which the researcher absorbed whilst researching, which pertains to the analysis throughout the thesis. In other words, it is an overview and opening familiarisation to both the clubs, and some of the issues that will be expanded on later. As such, themes that will be developed are introduced through the ethnography, though they are not analysed until the next three chapters.

I am bringing to life my representations, to make my narrative, and my thesis, credible (Latour and Woolgar, 1979; Collins, 1985; Schaffer, 1989).

The second half of this chapter is about the games themselves, about rugby league and rugby union. I compare and contrast the perceptions and beliefs about these two games from within the field, and show that ideas about rugby, amateurism and professionalism that are taken as 'givens' in the public domain do not tally with the experience I encountered in the field.

Netherborough Rugby Football Club

There is a neat dividing line of green belt between the council estates south of the city and the textile town of Netherborough, which recently celebrated the centenary of the building of its town hall. The impetus behind the town hall's building came from an influential mill owning family, one of whose sons was the driving force behind the reformation of the rugby club after the war of 1914-1918. The club itself is based in the south of the town, away from the council owned houses (where a rugby league club has been formed in the last five years) and in a suburb of detached houses and open parks, close to the Grammar School. Situated between the heavy industry of the city and the shoddy mills of smaller towns, Netherborough (on first appearance) seems unusually out of place - as if, with the decline of the mills, it went one way towards gentrification, and similar towns suffered a decline towards shadows of former glories and faded municipal enterprise. The town hall became a defunct reminder of a quaint past with the local government reorganisation in 1974, when the town became just another suburb of the city. The civic pride that led the burghers into building their town hall was set back when the town - already threatened with the growth of new commuter estates for the city - lost its legal identity when the city council followed the commuter estates upwards. Yet in the club there is a sense of community, a sense of Netherboroughness, that was exemplified in the years immediately following the local council reorganisation when the club dominated the County Cup. The players, supporters and members of Netherborough RFC found in their team, in their game, a site for a revival of parochial affiliation and self-identity. Through the club they could express an idea of 'Netherborough' and 'Netherborough' man that they felt was an ideal. It is no casual coincidence that on the programme covers during the season I followed them, taking pride of place, was not a rugby player - but the town hall.

From my house to the club I follow the ring road, passing through the south west fringes of the city through a natural valley. It is a sign of how enculturated the car is in our society that the actual shape and boundaries of the places we live have become defined by roads. Where the ring road is a dual carriageway it creates a barrier between the city inside and the affluent suburbs outside. My approach is not an arbitrary decision. Because the club is on the south side of the town I choose not to turn right up the motorway, as motorways shield the user from their surroundings as much as the surroundings are shielded from the motorway. Instead I take a road barely used by commuter traffic, which runs parallel to the motorway towards the top of the banks. This road begins and ends in factories, yet in the middle is free of development. As one drives out of the city up the hill, with the office blocks and the football club in the mirror, one passes the old Jewish Cemetery. This is the most visible marker of the old city boundaries, for it was only outside the city that Jews were allowed to be buried. Now the cemetery is overlooked by the motorway and high rise blocks, though it is hidden from both ends of the road.

At the end of the road the village has been swamped by Netherborough's industrial estates, benefitting from the junction of a number of large roads. The road to the club is left, past a monstrous Tetley pub positioned next to a crossroads. The suburb to the south is one of wide avenues and trees, a quiet place compared to the traffic on the road that marks its southern extremity. In the heart of this black stone housed district, next to a large urban park, is Rugby Lane, home of Netherborough RFC. Finding it for the first time can be a difficult task, for a tiny sign pinned to a telegraph pole on the main road pointing down the right avenue is easy to miss. For the people involved in rugby union, there is no need to be directed to the ground: one knows where it is. However, the lack of any decent warning over the ground's location suggests that outsiders are not really encouraged. Those who want to know its location know it already, so the sign (or lack of) is only a problem for casual supporters and unsure ethnographers. Even when

one has found the correct turning, there are no clues as to where the ground is: no open spaces for car parking, no floodlights, no sense of proximity. One reaches a small roundabout at the park gates, where three roads meet, and only then will you see the street sign for Rugby Lane. From this point one stumbles into the club in the space of a few yards, taking a sharp left through the gates next to the turnstile.

On a match day, or a busy training night, this manoeuvre is not possible for non-members. However, it affords the driver a view both of the ground and of the city below in the distance. The club house is modern, an extension built onto the original stand at the near end and around the back. Opposite the stand, across the fenced off pitch, is a smaller building and open space for standing spectators. There is some terracing on the stand side at the near corner. The stand itself looks as old as the town hall, though it was built in the second half of this century. It is painted in the club colour, along with the fence and other fittings in the ground. Its wooden interior structure would, in all probability, be criticised under the Taylor Report, but the report did not include union clubs of Netherborough's status. The changing rooms used to be under the stand, but the extension work continues on the far side to include new facilities and - significantly - a fully equipped gym. The pitch itself is in good condition and floodlighted, as is another pitch on which the first team trains. There are two other pitches on the site, though later I am informed the council owns one of them and is contemplating selling it for housing. The dependency on the council of the city is one that rankles with the committee members I interview: they get nothing by way of subsidy except the use of the pitches, and even this is threatened. Not being in debt (morally, if not financially) to the council would please the committee members, but at the same time the club could not run its junior and lower open-age teams without the council pitches.

Although there is a set time for training, Monday and Thursday evenings from seven until nine, most of the first teamers use the gym before training and at other times during the

week. The commitment to training differs from player to player. Jason trains every night, usually by himself at a gym and on playing fields near his home. On Mondays and Thursdays he is one of the first to turn up, however, at the gym at the ground. At the opposite scale to Jason is the team captain, who opts to turn up at seven for training and isn't seen on any other day. He runs a lot in his spare time, but is less dedicated to training than the younger players.

Inside the gym it is an all male terrain. There is a picture up on the wall of one of the first team bending down in readiness for a line out throw, cut out of the local paper. There is a crude reference to homosexuality scawled in a balloon alongside it, mocking both the player and the coach: "ooo yes, Alan, come and get me, big boy". The newness of the paint is evident, it is white and gives the gym an added flavour alongside the usual smell of sweat. Some consideration has been made to account for privacy and ventilation, for the windows are high up on the wall but open.

Rob is standing over Jason, who is on a bench lifting free weights. Whilst Jason is grunting and sweating, Rob is humming to himself along to a Madonna song. The music is coming from a stereo attached to a hook on the wall, and they have turned up the bass so that the dull thump can be heard from outside the building. They are the only players in the gym, and when I enter Rob shouts at me to shut the door. Jason ignores me, concentrating on heaving through the last few repetitions.

As he begins to flag, Rob starts to give him some encouragement, predictable "Come On! Come On! Two more! One more! Yes!!". There is something orgasmic about it, especially when Rob takes the barbell from Jason, who sighs and groans in relief. He slides from the bench and Rob holds onto the barbell with a cocky grin.

"Fuckin' 'ell," he says in a broad Yorkshire accent, "this is fuck all, I thought you were lifting heavy stuff."

On the training pitch the distinction between the men of the pack and the boys of the backs is increased by their separation to run through drills. The forwards hog the most ground, along one line and in the middle, to practice set pieces with Alan the coach. The backs tend to congregate around Jason - although young a 'wisehead' - and Daniel, an ex-player and the first team manager: they tend to run through moves involving dummy runners and complicated passes, and the prevalence of rugby league jerseys (including Jason, who always wears a Bradford Northern shirt) could fool a casual observer into thinking they were an amateur rugby league team. The tokens of identity for the rugby union imaginary community seem to have come under pressure: however, these players come from the wider locality of the M62 Belt, and such tokens as rugby league jerseys express a casual interest in the game, and a support of rugby - among the youngsters there is no problem with these symbols from the 'other code', though the first team manager pointed out to me that some of the club members think "it's a shame they wear them".

In the gym, however, the traditional distinction of position disappears. The pecking order fluctuates - there is rivalry between who can lift the heaviest and for the longest, but the players who use the gym aren't the stereotypical forwards. Apart from the veteran hooker Rob, most of the players who use the gym on a regular basis are the youngsters of the team, players who have just graduated from the colts - as well as some of the second and third fifteen who want to bulk up for personal reasons (to look good).

For Jason and the others, the weights are a necessary part of their training, as they become more dedicated and professional. There is a tacit agreement that no-one else uses the gym when the first team squad go in before training. Yet there is no definite structure to the weights sessions, no coach to set targets and make attainable programmes. What is a good session has been defined by usage, by the players who bring to the sessions knowledge acquired

in books, from magazines, and from other teams. Hence there is a diversity of programmes, all of which are argued and defended by their adherents. In this atmosphere the masculine aura of competition, of showing off strength, has become an over-riding theme. Those who do weights, backs and forwards, share this culture of “attacking the gym”, and the domineering presence of Rob - the aggressive hooker - and Jason - the dedicated professional - provide two male role models which the other users of the gym look up to and try to emulate.

The players who tend not to use the gym on a regular basis are the ones who, perhaps unsurprisingly, look to the game and the club bar as a source of enjoyment and social interaction (though that is not to say social interaction does not take place in the gym).

The others in the bar are social members, ex-players, committee men, and supporters. It is a place (normally) for a quiet pint, a chat about the game and local affairs, and a place where networking is done amongst the small business class - it is a club in its most patrician sense, with women only present when the Ladies Committee has a meeting, or there is some function such as a quiz night, when wives are positively encouraged. It is not a place to go if one likes a crowd, as one ex-player tells me. He looks across at three players who have come in after training, and bemoans the fact that the first teamers are all too serious, and hardly any come from the town anymore. This is a source of tension in the social network: that team nights out are in the big city, and the club is rarely the focus of the masculine, drunken behaviour that goes under the name “team spirit” or “socialising”.

Chemicals Amateur Rugby League Football Club

There are many places in ‘the game’ of rugby league that hold iconic status, promised lands to which those on the fringes look to find the spirit of rugby league. One of these places is Sudthorpe, referred to with some reverence throughout ‘the game’ as a place where rugby

league players are made: where men are made. Like all the rugby league playing districts Sudthorpe is a depressed locality, a once thriving working class district south of the city. The link between the professional club and the fortunes (or lack of) of the district has been made by many in 'the game' - its closure at the time when much of the terraced housing had been pulled down provides a suitable allegory of the decline of the working class for many of my informants, as well as for other commentators (Green and Hoole, 1988; Spink, 1989; Moorhouse, 1989; Clayton and Steele, 1993). However, such analysis fails to take into account the people in Sudthorpe who never liked rugby league, or the people who live there now: Sudthorpe and an idea of 'Sudthorpeness' exclaimed by the members of the imaginary community are not to be confused.

Also, amateur rugby league has always prospered in the district.

Chemicals were formed in the fifties at the works that gave them their name, by a member of the professional club who was disillusioned with early attempts of commercialisation. For a long time they were supported by the works and played on a pitch on the estate by the river, before they moved to the Station Road site where they played during the course of this research. For a clubhouse they were based, like the other eight amateur teams in the district, at a pub. However, they were able to find funding for a clubhouse in the heart of the district with an adjacent pitch, to be built by the development corporation in the euphemistically titled 'Sudthorpe Green' estate, built on the wasteland in the north west of the district. The problem of dependence is less important to Chemicals: they see opportunities, not barriers, through being connected to outside groups.

It is to this clubhouse that I went whenever I was working with the club, though the matches were still played at the council pitch on Station Road, which was shared with other

teams and the women's rugby league club. Chemicals, though, as the highest ranking amateur club in the district, were always given priority.

To get to the clubhouse one can drive through the northern half of Sudthorpe, cut off from the big council estates and the site of the old professional club's ground by the motorway. Here on the north side is the centre of Sudthorpe, with its parish church and a large Morrisons supermarket, and a huge car dealers that sponsors the professional club. Most of the industry is close to the river, beyond a main road and the White Rose, a pub surrounded by warehouses in which one can find a rough decor and rugby chat. It used to be one of the pubs owned by an ex-player.

Coming from the site of the old ground, over the motorway and onto the Moor, both roads lead to pubs where the beer is tasty and the atmosphere is masculine. In these pubs, beer is bitter: you have to ask for lager. Apart from a pub in the centre, next to Morrisons, which is the place for youngsters to go "on t'pull", the other pubs in the district are just as male dominated, though the standard of beer differs (though again, a pint is bitter).

I can walk from one of these pubs, along the side of the Moor and over the railway, where there are another two pubs next door to each other. The smallest, the Foundryman, has pictures of Great Britain touring teams on the wall, and is the home of a successful pub side. It is, however, due to close, and the fear amongst the regulars who support the team is that it will be forced to break up. Already, two of the best players of the Foundryman have gone behind the pub to Chemicals: later I hear that the brewery which is closing the pub has offered the team a new base in the pub next door.

From outside the Foundryman it is a few hundred yards to the Boys' Club, and about a hundred as the crow flies to Chemicals clubhouse. Station Road is half a mile away, as is the Eden Castle, where the best Sunday side and the women's team is based.

At Chemicals itself the facilities are very impressive, something which amateur rugby league has lacked in the past. There is a function room, a committee room, an equipped gym that is more spacious than Netherborough's, but has less fixed weights. The changing rooms are clean and resemble those at leisure centres, and there is even a separate room for the match officials. And there is a disabled toilet, but as the secretary explained

'We told architects to put it in 'cos we were expecting [a BARLA official] to attend the opening, and 'e were in a wheelchair... then 'e goes an' dies before 'e gets to use it.'

Chemicals are hoping the large bar will act as a focus for rugby league in the Sudthorpe district, and there is talk of the club becoming the representative of the community (imaginary) that the professional club used to be. But so far the club hasn't pulled the men away from the pubs of the district, though it is quite popular with the Chemicals members, and functions are well attended by families. Indeed, the all male atmosphere that charges many of the pubs in the district is absent from the club, as players' families stay in the clubhouse whilst the men train.

There is a tension at the club between some of the committee and supporters - who are part of the Sudthorpe rugby league male social network, who like the feeling of belonging playing teams from the coalfields, chatting about rugby and having a few drinks - and the majority of the players and one of the coaches, who see themselves as professionals, dedicated to training and winning, though the old drinking and fighting habits are still present in the squad. Like Netherborough, there is an innuendo that the players, the ones who have come to the club to train hard and win, are being paid. The coach, a good friend of Sudthorpe's most famous contemporary player, has ambitions of running junior sections, of getting all the best young lads from the amateur teams in Sudthorpe, and joining the National Conference. Like some of the committee, who sneer at the professional club for not belonging to Sudthorpe, this coach feels the club can take over the professional club's role, but only by being professional themselves.

I interview him after a match, after we have driven back in a minibus to the clubhouse and the players have shuffled out, aching and clean, to the buffet in the bar. He tells me that the club should change its name, become Sudthorpe Eagles or somesuch, and says they are attracting the local lads the professional club have ignored, as well as top class players from outside the area (his words were confirmed by the signing of Dave, a fringe first teamer, from Sudthorpe RLFC, a young back).

In the steam and mucky water of the changing room the coach becomes quite animated when he talks of the failure of amateur rugby league to attract support and finance in the way rugby union clubs like Netherborough have achieved (he does not know, as I do, that Netherborough make the same complaints about rugby league stealing their potential support and sponsors and players). At the end of the interview I ask him what chances there would be of Chemicals merging with the professional club to become semi-professional and based in the locality. He laughs and promises me he will take Chemicals all the way into the Rugby Football League.

By the end of the season he is sacked for clashing with the committee and his assistant, and his coaching methods replaced by traditional 'English' ones. The tension in the imaginary community was resolved in favour of older, unAustralianised methods.

Sudthorpe Rugby League Football Club

In the course of this research it became clear to me that many of the people I spoke to who identified with Sudthorpe, or the idea of Sudthorpeness they found in the imaginary community of 'the game', did not even live anymore in the area. Being a 'Sudthorpe man' was nothing to do with people who actually lived there. It was, in the eyes of others who identified with that label, an idea of a white, working class, rugby league following man who liked a drink,

a bit of rough stuff, and was definitely heterosexual. Whether these men actually were all those things became immaterial, it was what they thought, and what others in the social networks accepted them as.

Sudthorpe Rugby League Football Club, in many respects, shares this idea of a mythical identity, as for twenty years the club has been based outside the district. This is not a new sporting phenomenon: Charlton played at Crystal Palace, as do Wimbledon now, and clubs move with regularity in the commercial world of professional American sport. But Sudthorpe spent over two decades “in exile”, as one fan told me, yet not once did they drop the claim that they were Sudthorpe’s team, representing Sudthorpe, representing Sudthorpe rugby league, and giving a focus to the idea of Sudthorpe man.

Their last temporary home before they returned to a council built sports stadium three hundred yards from their old Southwood ground was in the west of the city, close to where I live, at the home of another professional club. Both teams were of equal ability, languishing in the lower reaches of the Rugby Football League, and average crowds were around the five hundred mark. One of the fears both sets of fans had was that they would be forced to merge to create a South City team.

The Sudthorpe fans, along with the Sudthorpe directors, still looked to Sudthorpe as “home”, and suffered the alienness of a district five miles from Sudthorpe only because for the Sunday afternoon it became Sudthorpe, when they could meet up with their friends, as they did in the pubs, and watch their team play. A new coach had arrived at the club, and had brought in youngsters to replace the older hands who retired to assist the reserves and Academy teams.

Although nominally a professional club, and although the nature of rugby league means a high turnover of players, there is still a close bond between the squad and the dedicated fans. Most of the players are only supplementing their other jobs (or benefits) with winning money,

there are no large contracts to feed lifestyles noticeably different to those of the supporters. In addition, three of the first team were born and live in Sudthorpe and the surrounding district: more importantly they learnt their rugby at the Boys' Club or at one of the other junior clubs in the district. They know the people on the terraces, they have played rugby with some of the younger lads: one of those currently in the team, whose dad drinks with Graham from the Boys' Club, played with our kid for the Boys' Club when they were both fourteen.

I write for a trade paper, doing match reports, and as a reporter I have been able to get access to the professional team more easily than as a researcher, though they know I am both (as well as a fan). Reporting on matches provides an opportunity to observe the life of the club, as well as gaining an insight into the media production of expressions of masculinity.

The secretary was until recently based at the club office and shop at a football ground in the south of the city, where the club had played a few years ago. Even though it is a professional club, Sudthorpe makes do with one full time officer to run everything, so he supplies the shop, organises sponsorship, deals with players contracts, finds stewards and doctors and PA announcers for first team, Alliance and Academy matches, liases with the Rugby Football League, and writes and edits the programme. He is a very energetic man (before I finished this thesis he had been headhunted by a larger club).

The first match at the new stadium is what makes his job worthwhile. As a large crowd descends on the ground and old players and guests are treated to a buffet in the bar, Ken is busy showing us reporters where to go, in between ushering official guests towards the food and wine. Even so, he finds a moment to look out of the window and smile.

I am at the ground to interview Arthur, an ex-player from Sudthorpe's best team of the last fifty years, who was responsible for creating a new club when the old club folded. I am aware of the man's status as a hero at the club, but luckily I bump into an old member of the club

(the man who founded Chemicals) who knows Arthur well. He takes me over to Arthur, who is talking to a player I recognise from my youth. Arthur tells me, for the paper, the usual stuff about being glad to be back home, about how great it was that the club could get back involved in the community and perhaps one day be great. I know from talking to the fellow from the other paper, and a local radio reporter, he has said pretty much the same to them. Yet there are tears in his eyes: he means it.

The first match back draws a big crowd, and the dewy eyed nostalgia is made perfect by the fact the team actually beats the visitors.

Two weeks later I return and the crowd is around eight hundred. In the bar I see the usual faces, and in the dressing room the coach is just as frantic about making sure the visitors don't know who he's playing. He is often described as a modern coach in the press, which leads some of the fans to criticise him for making the team play like Australians. At training sessions he lets his assistants take the players through the basics whilst he looks on like a general in deep thought. Some of the more senior players dislike him intensely (and some have left the club), and there isn't the pally atmosphere that was around under the old coach. But those who are there respect him as a good coach - the distance between them is a professional one, and the club is now attracting players who want to work with him (and use the facilities at the stadium).

It is in the Academy side that the club now starts new young signings, and before the move back to Sudthorpe by the club the Academy side played all its matches at a ground just south of the district. The side is unusual in that an Asian boy plays (there are only two Asian professionals in the RFL), though he does not have a professional contract unlike four of the others. The Academy side's greatest hope is Peter, stepson of one of the Boys' Club coaching assistants, who played in their under-18 side. Half of that team has gone. First to go were the best two who signed for Wigan when they were still the under-16s. Others have gone to

Dewsbury, where an ex-Boys' Club coach is now in charge of the Academy. Peter, however, was encouraged by his dad and his support of Sudthorpe to sign for them. He misses the "crack" with his old mates, but the coach thinks he has the right attitude to make it into the first team, and he has been in the first team squad twice this season. Like Jason at Netherborough, he is dedicated to the training and restrictions on his social life that he knows are needed to be the best.

Sudthorpe Boys' Club Junior Rugby League Football Club

My first memory of the Boys' Club is being given a tin of *berlingots* aniseed sweets by the president of a visiting French rugby league team. Unlike the other three clubs in the research, the social networks that surround the junior club, and the forms of life they entail, are intimately connected to me through my own participation. Not only is a close relative on the management committee, but I have been involved there since I was a young would-be professional rugby league player.

The club is based on the western side of the district, where a large section of terraced houses was knocked down to build flats and a distributor road for the urban motorway. I vaguely remember these flats behind the shell of the club: they too were dragged down ten years ago, after the council declared them unfit for habitation. Now, after a long time of being wasteland, the area is being rebuilt by the city development corporation, and a new estate of housing association and private semi-detached houses with a village name is rising from the dust. It is in this redevelopment that the Chemicals are based: I can see their clubhouse from the Boys' Club car park, just over a stretch of landscaped grass and saplings.

The club is a basic block, which houses a number of facilities. At the front it is in the shadow of a car auctioneers and a pub that may have once stood at the end of a terraced road.

The pitch on which the teams play is over a footbridge that crosses a railway line and onto the Moor. Before industrialisation it might have been a desolate place, but now the name is a strange anachronism, with a motorway on one side and an empty factory on the other, with a dangerous subway at the far end where kids hang around on bikes.

Once, when I was younger, I split my knee open there on a broken bottle half hidden in the grass. It is seen as common land, and the club is always 'complaining of people walking their dogs there, and on two or three occasions they have had arguments with the council over travellers who have stopped on the Moor. At every match there is a tension between the club and other users of the Moor such as the kids who ride up and down on their bikes, or others who play impromptu games of touch rugby at one end whilst the match is down at the other. But at important matches the area of the pitch is delineated by the parents and spectators who hog the touchline, who want to see "t'lads laiking". When the under-18s played, there was always a knot of open age players, both from amateur teams and from Sudthorpe, standing apart with the professional clubs' scouts.

Although the club runs other sections (and hires out its hall to the scouts and its chapel to the Jehovah's Witnesses), most of the money and effort is directed to boxing and rugby at all junior age groups. Just rugby, not league or union: it is assumed you know which one should be played. And for the adult men who run and support the club, the highlights of the year are the annual boxing nights and the rugby exchange with a French club.

When the discussions are held about the annual exchange there is a polarisation of opinion between the old members, who still raise funds for the club, and the paid leader, who suffers in the eyes of the others because of his London origins. He wants the publicity the exchange brings, but is nervous about security. On previous visits, there have been fights between the older French boys and some of the locals, but his worries are set aside when it is

arranged that the French under-18s do not come. Mark is also happy, for he was concerned his “lads” would have murdered the French on the pitch.

I arrive at the club to see the French have already arrived, and are settling in playing on the machines inside, and on the pool tables. A girls’ boxing session in the gym has attracted the attentions of around a dozen of the fifteen year olds, and they are cracking jokes amongst themselves. A local lad is with them, and I hear him speaking in the loud but slow manner caricatured in so many sitcoms.

“They won’t want owt to do wi’ you frogs, they like men not boys.”

This refrain of manhood is repeated when the under-16s play. The lad who spoke is the hooker, the son of an ex-professional who played for Sudthorpe, who is also one of the old members of the club. He is a good player, but he loses patience with the French tackling when a team mate is hit high. He shouts at the referee, one of the Boys’ Club coaches, who is losing control. The local lads give away a penalty in the second half that results in the French drawing level, and names begin to be called in both languages. I know there is going to be a fight. The hooker is raging, and his opposite number is gesturing back at him. On the touchline another lad, one of the under-18s, calls to the winger to calm the hooker down, as the referee shows no inclination to ease the tension. The winger shrugs his shoulders: he wants no part in any of it.

The fight starts as soon as the first French player runs up with the ball. Next to me four girls shout in mock horror as the hooker is elbowed in the face, but he does not go down and wrestles with his attacker. All the other players rush in bar the nearest winger and his opposite, who shrug and smile at each other. They have both played fast and fair, and have no quarrel with each other. Mark comes onto the pitch and starts to argue with the referee: I hear swearing but not much else. Then he turns on the Boys’ Club captain and threatens him with something. On

the touchline the French lads not playing jeer, and one of their coaches is remonstrating with my dad, who is acting as an interpreter.

The match never finishes, as the French players are called off by their coach. This sinks in slowly amongst the spectators. Dave from the Chemicals club stands there with his brother even after all of the lads are trudging past the pub to the changing rooms. I walk back with Graham, one of the old members and committee men, who has a genuine love of France. He is shaking his head.

“They should’ve stayed on, it’ll only cause trouble tonight, they ‘aven’t got rid of all their energy... it’s that bloody [hooker]’s fault, ‘e should ‘ve been told to lay off ‘em, they’re only French.”

Graham’s comment taken out of context would appear to be xenophobic. However, as I sensed at the time, his concern was more a patrician’s concern, worried about *his* boys. In Graham’s world, the far south of France is nearer to the centre of Sudthorpe than the houses on the other side of Southwood Road: the French are known not as French rugby league players - they are members of the imaginary community of ‘the game’ who just happen to speak a strange language.

Discussion: the games they play

At each of the clubs there is a tension between the old and the new. As a researcher caught in the middle I was privy to differing explanations of what was called at times a club’s “spirit”, its “reasons” or “atmosphere”. What was being articulated was what they felt to be the *raison d’être* of their club and their game: what it was each individual felt was important to them about their own interaction with the field.

Of course, this led to me asking questions about myself, about what my *raison d'être* was. The people I spoke to at the union club, for instance, were happy with the caricature I drew of a university researcher who had played a bit as an undergraduate. People at the club such as Lee Kirk had done Leisure Studies degrees, others knew of friends and relatives who had been to my first university. I was not the first researcher to work at the club, and I was not the last. An undergraduate at this college did dissertation work on the league/union divide there after I had introduced him to one of my contacts. The fact I was a rugby league fan did not disturb them much either, as I came to realise most of the people at the club also watched the game, or at least acknowledged its right to exist.

Initially there was some hesitancy over what I was doing there, but once I had helped the club treasurer in the quiz night it was accepted I would be hanging around the place.

For the league clubs my role was harder to define, though acceptance was inevitably easier to come by. Warnings about the dangers of 'going native' (Spradley, 1979) were perhaps twenty three years too late. But although I am heavily involved in rugby league, I have also grown away from it. I could look back, not in an objective and disinterested way (Maguire, 1988), but in an intensely subjective way. I know what's going on because I am involved, and it is for precisely that reason that this involvement became important. My work as a reporter gave me access to the production of meaning, family and friends opened up access to all three clubs, and individuals were quick to trust me when I chatted with them informally about matches, players and all the other snippets of gossip that prove the talker is enculturated.

It may be argued that I could not see the tacit meanings and forms because of my lack of an objective viewing position. But as I have discussed in Chapter Three, the idea that one can be objective has inherent flaws. Of course Graham at the Boys' Club cannot articulate the tacit, but he is aware of its existence even though he has not been trained in our academic language. When

he talks about rugby as being good for teaching boys discipline that is his expression of the tacit concept of the game as a creator of desired masculinity. Unlike Graham, I do have training in academia. I can express concepts and argue about signifiers, and because of that I am removed slightly from the life I am observing. Hence, what was tacit becomes revealed - either through a gradual understanding of patterns, or through a Paulian conversion when one suddenly realises what, how or why.

So I saw myself in an almost shamanistic role, interpreting the everyday whilst living it. In doing so I was aware that my own subjectivity would affect that interpretation, yet I think this is both crucial to the thesis - my own role as a researcher (Bourdieu, 1990; Whyte, 1993) - and also a problem that can be dismissed because it is this felt experience I am trying to describe (Ely, 1991).

It can be seen that, on the surface at least, the clubs were very similar to one another. The old values enshrined in social rugby (Sheard and Dunning, 1973) are being replaced by the concept of serious leisure (Stebbins, 1982); as predicted by Dunning and Sheard (1979) both codes are becoming increasingly professionalised. Although Sudthorpe were the only team to pay their players openly, I saw payments being made at Netherborough ("expenses") and the coach at Chemicals hinted such practice was common at his club and other top amateur rugby league clubs. This commodification of players' bodies (Falk, 1994; Featherstone, 1992) reflected the commercialisation of the clubs, who were struggling to compete not only in their own leagues but with each other for players, spectators and sponsorship. Only Chemicals were optimistic about their future: even the Boys' Club was concerned about the lack of funding and the danger of losing players to the professional Academy system, or a youth section supposedly due to be set up by Chemicals.

The image portrayed in the national media has, until the open professionalisation of union, always suggested league was a predatory sport that preyed on union clubs, robbing them of their talent. Chris Rea, writing in the Independent on Sunday, suggested that rugby league supporters were:

'...consumed not so much by the hypocrisy... of the amateur game. Rugby union has almost everything that rugby league covets... [rugby union] has almost everything that rugby league covets... Vernon Pugh [the then secretary of the RU International Board] was perfectly correct when he described league as being 'essentially parasitic'' (Rea, 1994)

The stereotype has always been the league scout scouring the Welsh valleys, taking their sons away to a foreign field (Melling, 1994). Whilst rugby league has a long history of Welsh rugby union players 'going north' (Gate, 1986a), the number of union players in league remains small: a report in Open Rugby showed that only nine percent of professional signings were from union, compared to amateur, junior and overseas rugby league (Edgar, 1994). Stars will always be sought after to boost big teams, and the changes to union have shown that players like Jonathan Davies can travel both ways.

At the level of the four clubs in the research, the issue was much more complex. The free gangway between the RFU and BARLA was established in 1987, and allows a player to "play both union and amateur rugby league on the same weekend" (Maurice Oldroyd, Chief Executive BARLA), should they desire. However, the chair of Netherborough seemed to think the free gangway meant "we can sign one of theirs, they can sign one of ours, and we can then sign him back, but it's got to be one or the other". The free gangway is also broken in rugby league development areas, where amateur Japanese rugby league players were banned for life by the JRFU (Hope, 1994), and in Reading where a union club intending to form a league section was threatened with ejection from the RFU (conversation with Trevor Gibbons, Open Rugby). My

own experience of playing for an open-age amateur rugby league team in East Anglia was that the best players - who were often service men from nearby bases, or young union players wanting a try under the rules of the free gangway - were pressurised to stop playing league with the threat of non-selection in the union teams. In the case of the service men, this pressure took on a social form from others at their base who ostracised them. At Netherborough, Jason was a keen rugby league fan, but had never taken advantage of the free gangway because of social pressure and financial inducement in the shape of a job at one of the Vice Presidents' legal offices.

Away from the politics played by the governing bodies (and fanned by the media), all four clubs realise they are chasing the same players. At junior level, Netherborough is strong, and there is not much overlap between their kids and those of the Boys' Club. However, as the youth game at under-18 level becomes more like the open age game, with teenagers training hard and playing seriously (Stebbins, 1982), the cross code poaching has surfaced. Netherborough lost two of its juniors to Mark's team at the Boys' Club, partly due to his familiarity with them (he lives in Netherborough) but also because those juniors were league fans. But the Boys' Club has also suffered, with professional Academy sides taking away most of Mark's successful team.

At open age level, Netherborough feel confident their facilities are far superior to those on offer at any amateur rugby league club, and the formation of two amateur rugby league teams in the town has not made an impact on their three open age sides: the first team manager was quite proud to tell me two of the second team were back with the club after a season of league. The use of the free gangway in Oldroyd's sense is not encouraged - the club would not want lads playing union and league at the same time because they feared injuries, and suggested a player could not devote as much time to union if he was also playing league. The same arguments, obviously reversed, were mentioned at Chemicals, though they did not see any danger in union

taking league players because “they’re different lads who play them”. That said, one of the Chemicals first team squad had played union for another club in the city until he joined the rugby league team.

The professional club did have two players initially signed from rugby union, but on inspection these turned out to be players brought up playing both codes and preferring league: players who had always intended to play league once they’d got an offer. Only the top clubs make big union signings from Wales or abroad. The real danger to clubs like Netherborough is amateur rugby league, though the free gangway has not led to mass signings either way.

One of the popular misconceptions used by the media in general was that, before the professionalisation of union, rugby league was merely the professional equivalent of rugby (without the union, to imply there was one game: rugby). The respondents at Netherborough, although aware of amateur rugby league, constantly used the language of the amateur-professional divide in their discourse. For instance, one respondent talked of

‘League players aren’t alien, if they want to make money from rugby then they can go and play league.’

Another said

‘Rugby league is a professional game... rugby’s like any sport, if you want to play for the enjoyment of it you can come here [to Netherborough], if you want to be bought and sold you can go to league.’

The tacit assumptions being made were that league equalled professionalism, hence union equalled amateurism. This could be seen by the constant reference to amateurism being a key concept in rugby union, a connection so well made little more need be said (Laidlaw, 1974; Dunning and Sheard, 1979; Jones, 1994). The Netherborough club chairman, for instance, described rugby union as being “essentially an amateur game, where players play because they

want to play, not because they're paid to do so". This perception of the relationship between the two codes was easily extended to include the assumption, present in the quotes cited, that league was "merely an adjunct to the game of rugby, for professionals" (according to one union administrator).

These ideas, reinforced by the media (for example see Rea, 1993), do not stand up against the analysis of the four clubs. First of all, rugby league is predominantly amateur, with approximately 1400 teams nationwide affiliated to BARLA, as opposed to the 35 clubs affiliated to the RFL (BARLA, 1994). Worldwide, most rugby league players are amateur, with only the top flight in Australia and England being full time professionals (Delaney, 1995). Secondly, league is a separate game from union: the respondents involved in rugby league all took offence at my Devil's advocate suggestion that they were involved in a professional arm of rugby union. The ethnography, however, reveals two final points that cast light on the relationship between the two codes.

Sudthorpe, the professional rugby league club, operates at a level far removed from the strict definition of professional. On the field, although the players are paid, this money is not enough to make them full time: their principal sources of income remain away from rugby league. Also, the organisation of the club has only one full time administrator: much of the effort put into the running of the club is on a voluntary basis by unpaid helpers rather like the situation at the other three clubs. To suggest professional rugby league is "professional" in the sense of full time players and large businesses misses the mark - before the introduction of the Super League, the majority of the professional rugby league clubs were in a similar situation to Sudthorpe: controlled by directors who saw the club as a serious hobby, with players supplementing their outside wages with fees for playing and winning rugby league matches.

On the other hand, the players are becoming more professional in their approach to the game, dedicating more time to training and winning. This can also be seen at Netherborough in players such as Jason, and in the ambitions of the Chemicals' coach: to a greater or lesser extent, each club (and each game) is becoming more professional on the field. This brings with it a greater incentive to find and retain the best players, and as such the expenses paid to players at Netherborough, along with the packets handed to three players during one training session, and the admission by one of the members that finding jobs was part of the deal for players at Netherborough, become understandable. Such "shamateurism" has been part of rugby union's history for a long time - Dai Davies of Llanelli was paid two shillings a match in the 1920s (Melling, 1994) - and the open professionalism that is now allowed has finally legitimised such practices. The top level of amateur rugby league is also implicated in shamateurism. One respondent claimed

'[A team in the National Conference] are the best to play for, cos they're all on straight contracts win or lose.'

This implication of payment, hinted at by the Chemicals' coach, was supported by a suggestion by a reporter at a match I attended that players were better paid at some of the top amateur clubs than at struggling professional clubs like Highfield (who have won only a handful of games in the past three seasons). During the writing of this thesis West Hull, a team from the National Conference, beat two professional teams in the Challenge Cup, and attracted attention from the local media. In a report on local television (Look North, BBC Leeds, 9 February 1996) it was revealed that West Hull's main sponsor, a fish processing company, employed at least two of West Hull's players, the stand off Gary Lumb and Dean Subritsky, a New Zealander who had somehow ended up playing 'amateur' rugby league in a northern English fishing port. Finding employment for players is one of the tricks of 'shamateurism' which rugby league people often

raised when questioning union's stance. This also occurred at Netherborough, where Jason admitted that his job was found for him as an incentive to stay at the club.

It can be concluded that the idea of the amateur/professional is a sham, and does not describe the relationship between the two codes, even before the professionalisation of union. It was a political divide, defined by union's exclusion of league, and a cultural divide defined by class caricatures over sport's ethos (Melling, 1994; Moorhouse, 1995; Schofield and Hanson, 1995). The ethnography of the four clubs reveal that there are many similarities between them, as they cope with tensions from commercialisation, and the issues over what 'the game' means for older members and younger, dedicated members of the imaginary communities. They are best described as being sites for serious leisure, as Stebbins' describes the boundary between leisure for leisure's sake and commercialised professionalism (1982). The players and administrators on the whole take their sport seriously, though there are some who seek careers in sport or are happy just to dabble. As for the distinction between amateurs and professionals, this becomes unsustainable when this concept is applied to the ethnography of the four clubs: the terms have become cultural and social labels. Here the clubs differ, as the concept of amateurism is connected in the union club with the cultural divide due to the predominantly middle class nature of that game's ethos, whereas the amateur rugby league clubs have a working class culture that has come from the imaginary community of 'the game' itself. The terms amateur and professional are arbitrary tools of exclusion and inclusion, part of the language of identity and belonging, which is the focus of the next three chapters.

Chapter Six

Brass bands and symbols: the construction of community

'League has my allegiance... because it is an expression of who I am and where I come from, the history of my people and our ancestral lands... rugby league has remained unusually true to itself, an expression of values... embedded deeply in the lives of generations on both sides of the world. Among other things, it is a last refuge of the brass band that marches while it plays.'

Moorhouse (1989: pp 10-11)

'We flatter ourselves with a mythology that teaches us to accept the virtue of passivity and amelioration, to sublimate whatever anxiety bedevils us... Only by accepting, so we say, the tradition that saw our parents through the worst excesses of the industrial revolution can we preserve the instinctive morality that binds together the people of Britain and hold the line against social overturning at a time when many of our faiths and indigenous traditions are at risk of being lost... The search for a vanished innocence is a favourite theme of all communities in times of tension or prolonged economic recession. The search is conservative for it seeks to disentangle the psychic complexities of the moment by purging nature and society of their mysteries and by affirming [invented values].'

Melling (1994: p. 93)

There is no escaping or avoiding the inevitable connection between rugby league and the M62 Belt of the north of England, and the industrialised small towns that lay within its reach. What that connection is, whether there is any necessary relationship between the population of the small towns and the game of rugby league is more problematic. Certainly, the only other

area of the country that supports a large amateur rugby league and professional fan base, the western coast of Cumbria, is also smalltown, white and working class. Yet Gareth Williams (1985, 1988; Smith and Williams, 1980) has shown that rugby union, the game some league people associate with “southerners and posh people, people who go to private [public] schools and drink bottled lager” (respondent), is a part of the lives of smalltown, white working class South Walsians, who share another similarity with many of the rugby league people in that the local industry was coal mining. Graham Williams (1994) has argued, like his namesake, that rugby union was and is a part of the lives of other working class people, those of the south west and the Midlands towns of Leicester and Northampton (see also Smith, 1994). Similarly, the role of football in the lives of the British working class has been commented on more than enough occasions (Cricher, 1979b; Holt, 1986; Metcalfe, 1988; Russell, 1988; Giulianotti *et al.*, 1994).

So the relationship between rugby league and the people who are involved with it is not as simple as some league people would claim it to be. Within the M62 Belt, there are two top rugby union clubs, and half a dozen from the next three divisions. The question of belonging, and why the connection between league and union and certain concepts that go towards describing and explaining belonging, was central to my research. In doing ethnographic work, in analysing my own sense of identity and that of others, it became clear through a grounded theoretical process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) that the problematic of community - both in the sense of a social group in a larger society and of a group or team within a sport - was the key to deciphering the myths and claims and arguments that had shaped the forms of life (Wittgenstein, 1968; Bloor, 1983) that the people in the ethnography used to understand themselves and their surroundings.

Geoffrey Moorhouse, at the top of this chapter, is one of rugby league's most coherent and literate writers. It is easy to see that rugby league, in his eyes at least, is an intimate part of

the culture of white, working class, urban north of England. In both his collection of essays on the game of rugby league (1989) and the history of the game entitled **A People's Game** (1995) - where "A People's Game" is understood in the sense of a game owned by and played by a group, a tribe (Moorhouse is more famous as a travel writer), not in the sense of a game that happens to be played by people in a more general use of the term - Moorhouse draws upon an idealised place, an idealised people, a northern working class who still appreciated the dignity and pride inherent in a marching brass band. Rugby league, according to Moorhouse, is an expression of this northern working class, as well as being a game that entails that class: as such, he decries any challenge to the game's values and traditions (with the notable exception, in the officially sanctioned **A People's Game**, of the changes occurring under the Super League proposals). For Moorhouse, and for others (Delaney, 1984; Green and Hoole, 1988; Gate, 1989, 1994; Clayton *et al.*, 1993, 1994, 1995a, 1995b), the connection between the region, the working class, the game and communal identity is apparent. It is a given, a part of their factual world: it does not have to be discussed or defended. For the purposes of argument, this position can be identified as being that of the 'traditionalists'.

Yet Phil Melling (1994) puts forward both a substantial critique of Moorhouse's position and at the same time suggests that the game of rugby league has been held back and victimised by these seemingly necessary connections between the game and the white, working class, northern stereotypes. His position can be caricatured as that of the 'expansionists', those who wish to see the game divested of its connections (real or imagined) with these northern stereotypes, and who see in Australianisation an increasing professionalism and commercialisation that can only benefit 'their' game. It is no coincidence that Melling is also one of the most vocal opponents of rugby union apologists and rugby league administrators alike. He is also one of the main organisers of amateur rugby league in South Wales, though he is

originally from Wigan. Melling argues that the game of rugby league cannot prosper while outdated values from a mythical past are superimposed on the game, as if the game and the people who watch and play it are one and the same. He dismisses Moorhouse's writing as wallowing in nostalgia for a place that never existed, and criticises the attitude of rugby league administrators who allow themselves and the game to be cast in the light of the northern music hall (as part of the rugby league's ill-fated Centenary celebrations Melling's argument was given extra symbolic weight when a production of The Good Old Days at Leeds City Varieties theatre was made central to the events) and the lamps by the pithead wheel.

Both Moorhouse and Melling are rugby league fans. Melling also played the game, and still coaches it at amateur level. They are both intelligent writers: Melling, apart from being a journalist, is a lecturer in American Literature. Yet their views over what the game means for the people involved, and what sense they make over the game's links with any identifiable community, are polarised.

Through an analysis of my fieldwork, I will explore in what sense - if any - the games of league and union are related to the people involved with them. I will explore what is meant by community, how and where the communities can be identified, and how they are created from the games and the people involved. To do this it is necessary to analyse the fieldwork and ethnography through concepts and categories, to produce an argument that develops from the work by A. P. Cohen (1978, 1985, 1986) and Benedict Anderson (1983) on the imaginary and the imagined, so that these communities can be established, and the tensions within and between them can be discussed. In doing this, the tension between the traditionalists and expansionists will be analysed in terms of a debate over meaning: what is referred to as a struggle for "the game's soul" in rugby union (after professionalism) and rugby league (during the Super League affair), struggles I will return to in Chapter Nine.

This chapter will explore the historical background to the perceived communities, the figurations of the games and the places they are played, before the role of imagined values and myths is discussed. From there I will identify the imaginary communities in both sports, and how this expresses class and regional identity, before showing how the symbolic boundaries are maintained, understood and contested. First, however, it is necessary to recap briefly on some of the theoretical ideas and terminology raised in Chapter Two.

The real, the symbolic, the imaginary, the imagined

Initially, when I started doing my fieldwork, I took the issue of community as unproblematic. I was more interested in finding out problems based on the amateur/professional divide and how they related to the history and class of the ‘community’ of Sudthorpe. However, it soon became clear that the definition of community I was using was flawed: it was too simplistic, and assumed an equality between a place known as Sudthorpe, and the Sudthorpe the people I was talking to mentioned. Also, there seemed to be both a smaller idea of community and a larger one, that both operated within the figurations of the clubs I was investigating.

As this chapter will show, the theoretical concepts I am using in this thesis are grounded in my observations during my ethnography, and in the analysis of semi-structured interviews and emic texts (Harris, 1964; Headland, Pike and Harris, 1990). The terminology that I use is applied *a fortiori* to this analysis, as the role of grounded theory is one that enables the analyst to return to the fieldwork from which the theory has developed and apply it (Strauss, 1987). Hence, the terms imaginary community, imagined community, real community, symbolic boundary and ‘the game’ all have to be defined, even though that definition came after my initial fieldwork through an interaction of data and a reading of relevant theoretical texts. Our language, my language, has to be understood (Anderson, 1978).

I use the term community to denote a collective of people who share similar world views and activities (such as Fleck's [1935:1979] concept of the thought collective mentioned in Chapter Two), that may or may not be located in one particular place. From this, following Cohen:

'Community exists in the minds of its members, and should not be confused with geographic or sociographic assertions of 'fact'. By extension, the distinctiveness of communities and, thus, the reality of their boundaries, similarly lies in the mind, in the meanings which people attach to them, not in their structural forms. As we have seen, this reality of community is expressed and embellished symbolically' (1985: p. 98)

The community that Cohen discusses can be described as the imaginary community, a community that exists symbolically, through shared understandings and meanings. The boundaries of membership thus are also symbolic, and are sites of contestation over what the symbols mean. Membership is therefore gained through sharing these meanings: hence one can develop a multi-layered concept of membership, where individuals share some meanings but not others, or where core meanings are givens, and only the margins are seen as places of tension. This community is not 'made up' or 'fantastical', the word imaginary is used only to denote the origin of the symbolic boundaries - as Cohen says, the community is real for its members.

Similarly, the term real community does not mean real in an external sense. This term is related to the idea of the invented tradition, which is the definer of Anderson's imagined community (1983). That is, the imagined is a community that is justified and legitimised by recourse to myths and traditions set in a past as perceived by its members: the community has to have some kind of genesis story to explain why it exists. As Cohen suggests, this process "is a selective construction of the past that resonates with contemporary influences" (1985: p. 99). In doing so the imagined, imaginary community is one of symbolic boundaries that has as its

perceived roots a history that is, in a sense, mythological (Cohen, 1978; Oz, 1983). Hence, the real community is what the members of the imaginary community inevitably refer to, usually in the historical sense: it is the site of their myth making and value systems, it is what legitimises the imagined, imaginary community they belong to. It may or may not be real in an external sense. What is important is its realness for the members of the imaginary community that refer back to it.

One can see the theoretical concepts that explain the fieldwork are a potential minefield of confusion. To make things somewhat clearer, the text will refer to the imaginary community based around the symbols and imagined myths centred on rugby league as 'the game'. The same sign will be used in the context of rugby union i.e. 'the game' of rugby union, meaning the imaginary community based around it (though this is not the same as 'the game' of rugby league). The imagined community will be referred to, where necessary, as 'Sudthorpe' or 'Netherborough', meaning the idea the members have of 'Sudthorpeness' or 'Netherboroughness', the values and symbols of local identity that have become conflated with 'the game' in the locality I am exploring. One can see how this easily applies to Russell's 'northern-ness' (Russell, 1996), which pertains to an imagined 'north' expressed in the imaginary community of Yorkshire cricket. Essentially, these concepts tell us something about the formation of identity and belonging, and how it is decided who becomes an insider: through the mutual knowledge (Giddens, 1984) shared between members of the meaning of the symbolic boundaries and the invented traditions.

The historical development of reality

Without exception, every single rugby league person I interviewed seemed to understand the connection between the game of rugby league and the places it is played. Sudthorpe, like

other places (Garbett, 1986; Hardcastle, 1986; Scargill, Fox and Crabtree, 1989; Ulyatt and Dalton, 1989; Latham and Hulme, 1990; Platt, 1991; Green, 1993; Clayton and Daley, 1994), is related to rugby league in their eyes. There is an indestructable connection between rugby league and Sudthorpe that is taken as a given, and the idea that the relationship could ever be any different is alien. As one respondent at the Boys' Club tried to explain

'There's always been lads playing rugby [league] in Sudthorpe, it were what made Sudthorpe famous.'

A director of the professional club developed this theme further, suggesting that "our club was the heart and soul of Sudthorpe, when the factories were packed close between [the old ground] and the river every single man who worked there looked forward to Saturday... it was the only entertainment he had, it was his team, they were playing for him, and of course he'd 've done anything to get a chance to play too."

The discourse suggests that the game of rugby league is somehow an inextricable part of the culture of a bygone age. Discussions on the game's past and the ways into the game that people traversed refer inevitably to this 'natural' state of affairs. They supported and played and organised rugby league because it was a normal thing to do, it was "in the blood". When asked to elaborate, the respondents often discussed the working-class culture that surrounded the game of rugby league and the district of Sudthorpe, which was located firmly in the past.

Bill Brown, an official of the Rugby Football League, was born and brought up in Sudthorpe, and for many years he was an official and supporter of the club until the old ground was sold and the club folded. When I interviewed him he was eager to pontificate at length on the spirit not just of the club, but of the community of Sudthorpe and its "rows and rows of back-to-backs, rough people who worked hard but there was a strong feeling of warmth, neighbourliness, like one extended family". For Bill, there was no distinction between "my club"

and “the largest village in the country”, as he described the locality. It is interesting that Bill fell back on the word village to describe what was a heavily industrialised inner city district. He is trying to conjure up the sense of community he remembers as being part of the real community of ‘Sudthorpe’, and in doing so has recourse to a connection between this sense of homogeneous belonging and a rural setting: the exemplar of community studies discussed in Chapter Two.

Bill described how he was initially an outsider, a grammar school lad from the fringes of the district, and from a family that had no interest in any sport at all. Rugby league was a way for the boy Bill Brown to enter the working-class world which was an immediate part of his life, but from which he was excluded due to his family and later schooling. His experiences, from which he draws his own understandings of the game of rugby league, are mainly second hand until adulthood. He described how, on a Saturday, men would converge on the ground from all over the district, following routes they had followed for years, passed down from father to son. The district’s men would go to the match while the women stayed at home doing housework, then he would go to the pub for a pint, then return for his tea, before going back to the pub to discuss the match with his friends. This was Bill’s memory of the relationship between the game and the locality of Sudthorpe: the club was the community, the community was the club, and there was no dividing the two.

Bill’s description of historical Sudthorpe, of the place on which memories and perceptions are based, is a typical example. Another respondent, a retired ex-committee member of the professional club and organiser of the local amateur league, expressed his joy at being taken by his father for the first time, as until then they had been too poor to let him go - this first match was a passage of manhood, complete with a description of their walk to the ground and the place he stood. It brought tears to his eyes, as he explained

'I dint know at the time 'ow much it meant for mi dad to tek me, to show 'is mates 'e could afford to bring 'is son, it gave 'im so much pride, in 'imself... we were that poor mi parents went wi'out to mek sure we were treated right... there was a charity that gave boots to poor kids, but mi dad never accepted 'em, 'e always turned 'em down even if it meant 'e couldn't go out drinking... but 'e always made sure 'e could get me in t'ground, because y'see 'e knew 'ow much it meant to me.'

The emotion of memory, of working class pride in respectability (e.g. see Hoggart, 1958), and of the centrality of the club and the game in the remembered community, have become conflated. Other respondents spoke of the working-class community, as they remembered it, and presented similar images of a harmonious relationship between rugby league and a working-class culture where "people knew each other's business". It is clear that the respondents who spoke of this historical Sudthorpe identified a working class, white culture, that had in itself social levels and boundaries that marked out belonging. Various roads were mentioned as being outposts of the community, borders between the inside and the outside (Elias and Scotson, 1994), and the population suffered little change either through emigration or immigration to other areas. Inside Sudthorpe itself, one respondent claimed that there was another level of belonging, an inner village towards the river - knowledge of its existence and its social relationships, he claimed, marked one out as truly belonging to Sudthorpe (Cohen, 1978; Elias and Scotson, 1994). Rugby league was one of the main definers in this creation of local cultural identity: the same respondent suggested playing as a professional enabled him to get access to the inside social networks that were otherwise denied to him as a black man and an outsider (Jenkins, 1994).

When respondents in the present tried to explain why they felt the game of rugby league was somehow connected to Sudthorpe a common response came through incantations of the

past - whether the past was presented as the glorious age of rugby league and Sudthorpe rugby league club (which had its share of success), or the thriving junior scene when every factory ran a team in workshop competitions, or whether these historical discourses were combined with descriptions of this working-class community and culture the older respondents remembered through their own perceptions. The sense of belonging they felt to Sudthorpe was the biggest reason they were involved with rugby league in Sudthorpe, or with the Sudthorpe professional club. This sense came from an identification with this historical working-class community, even though around half of the respondents involved in rugby league did not live there - they had moved out as the housing stock declined, or as they had changed jobs and lifestyles; or they had only inter-generational links with the area. They were describing the present in terms of the past.

A similar process occurred with the people involved at Netherborough rugby union club. Again, the connection between the club and the community was assumed, and confused when I discussed the club's origins. As I have shown in Chapter Five, the older people involved in the club see in the club an expression of the locality's historical independence from the city, and its historical, bourgeois values taken from the grammar school and the millowners - both of which figure prominently in explanations of this relationship. The club historian said that "it was realised by [famous millowner] that the town needed a club to occupy and educate further the boys who were leaving the grammar, so he helped them set it up". When the club was reformed it was the son of the millowner who was the prime mover. According to one respondent

'[Netherborough RUFC] has played an important part of local life, it has always represented the town... that's why we've always kept our identity.'

When I asked him whose identity he meant, the answer for him was obvious: both the club and the town, or rather the town's bourgeois class. Therein was a tricky paradox that the club secretary was aware of, when he discussed the club's identity and function in the town, as,

historically

'the club has attracted all classes, we've had everyone down here.'

The club historian also described a history in which everyone in the town had a relationship with the club, though he was aware of the clash with the discourse on the club's exclusiveness that others used to define the relationship between club and locality. He suggested that the club was always run as a place for everyone to play, but crucially the people who ran the club saw "a paternal duty to make sure they didn't feel unwelcome". In other words, the club was controlled by the business class of the locality, though it was perceived that Netherborough, "unlike the other clubs in the city" was egalitarian (cf. Chapter Eight).

One can see how the communities based around the games in the present are perceived by their members to have roots in real communities of the past - even when talking of the present, the past is invoked as "folk-history" (Cohen, 1985).

Team spirit and social networks

What I did not consider when I was developing my research problem was how the actual games I was exploring were social sites themselves. Both rugby league and rugby union are team games, involving social interaction between players on the same team (Donnelly and Young, 1988; Theberge, 1995). However, once I had realised this I wondered why I had missed this truism, that the sports create figurations based around the concept of team play (Elias and Dunning, 1986; Dunning, 1994). In such a situation the feeling of belonging that comes from being part of a team working together towards a goal (Hanson, 1991) becomes very relevant to the discussion about identity (Messner, 1990, 1992; Theberge, 1995).

Players tended to see in the figuration of the team a source of social cohesion and belonging, a site which they could use to find themselves and like minded companions. When the

figuration of the team was supportive and fulfilled this need of defining belonging and boundaries between those who did and did not belong (Mullan, 1995; Theberge, 1995), the players I spoke to referred to “team spirit”, “great mates”, and “family spirit”, describing the camaraderie as being - in the words of one respondent - “just like being on a school holiday”. One of the women players interviewed suggested that

‘It’s great being with others who are all doing what you’re trying to do, it’s like we’re all in it together, we’re playing for each other... of course when you’re out on the pitch and travelling with them you get to know ‘em, and that side, the social side, when it’s just us out together for a laugh.’

Jason, the young Netherborough player mentioned in Chapter Five, explained that “being here is more than playing, it’s... not the alikadoos [‘I like a do’: union expression for older committee members], it’s the lads, the team... you’ve got to be a part of all that, or else there’s no one’s gunna be there when you need them.”

Team sports like rugby league and union attract and support those who are willing to be part of a social team, a figuration, and as such the loner is excluded. As a coach of the amateur rugby league club put it, in blunter terms, “quiet fuckers don’t ‘ave a place in our team, our game, it’s about spilling blood for your mates.”

There is an important theme coming from the figuration of team and team spirit, that of expressing male identity through production and reaffirmation of social masculine behaviour. This, and the position of women rugby league players in coming to terms with these expressions of masculinity, are discussed in the next chapter.

As well as the players, my research involved other people involved in the games: those who supported the games, and those who were involved to some extent in organising the games and the clubs. Like the players, these exist in social networks that organise and shape their lives -

not necessarily connected to sport either. For example, they have friends and acquaintances they know in different social situations, whether it be work, school, family or other pastimes and leisure pursuits.

However, the games provide alternative social networks to which the members of the imaginary communities can belong. These include formally organised structures such as the rugby union club, which is a social organisation and meeting place for similarly inclined members of Netherborough's business class. Interestingly, there is a section of Netherborough's support who are not associated with the club in any other way - they see the game and team as a focus of their social network, but not the formal club.

The amateur rugby league club is trying to follow similar lines of organisation, by offering membership in return for use of facilities, but the social networks in rugby league are less defined. The people involved in amateur rugby league in the district of Sudthorpe are arranged in informal friendship/work social networks, which blur with the support base of the professional club. An official supporters' club of the professional club is dormant, as its organiser felt they had nothing to offer potential members while the club was playing outside the district. However, he still organises the supporters' coach to away matches, which is used by the same people previously associated with the supporters' club. At the new stadium, the supporters' club intends to reform as it will have a site where the social network can be anchored.

The contingency of place

Although I have suggested any connection with place is due to a contingent relationship between locality and imaginary community, brought about through a process of conflation and imagined, invented traditions, there are a number of sites that are necessary for the production and continuation of both the imaginary community based on union, and the one on league.

Netherborough rugby union club is an obvious focal point, a site for the production and maintenance of the imaginary community, as well as the imagined aspect of 'Netherboroughness'. Yet the club can be seen as a group of particular sites delineated through usage and access. In Chapter Five the gym and bar were shown to be different settings for social interaction at the club, populated by different people: dedicated players in the gym, social members in the bar. Between the bar and the gym there is the committee room, and the club office, which are off limits except to officials and those invited there - also, there is another bar (the old bar) that serves as a players' bar after matches, where visiting teams are given food and drink, away from the supporters and members in the main bar.

The gym and the changing room are in a separate section next to and behind the stand, and there is no connection between this players' area and the committee sites. Then there are the training pitches and the match pitch, clearly delineated from the stand and terracing from where officials and supporters watch the games.

A similar division of sites is seen at the rugby league clubs. The professional club has sites outside the area, where they were playing at other grounds until recently, and at a new stadium in the district, where they also have a gym. Chemicals are playing on the same council pitch as the women's team, who train at a sports centre on the opposite side of the district to their pub base. And the Boys' Club is divisible into committee sites, changing rooms, play areas and boxing facilities: again, they play on a public pitch.

In the imaginary community of 'the game', and that part of it explored in the fieldwork, the most important sites for social interaction are the pubs of the district. Pub culture, and the figuration of pub rugby, is a crucial site for the expression of masculinity, hence it will be covered in more detail later. However, it is relevant at this juncture to say that these pubs form the basis of the relationship between the imaginary community, the game of rugby league, and the locality

and real community of historical Sudthorpe, which has created the idea of ‘Sudthorpeness’.

‘Sudthorpe’, ‘Netherborough’ and belonging

Graham is a committee man at the Boys Club, who also organises most of the fundraising for the club, of which he was once a junior player. He is a fan of the professional club, having followed it through its years of wandering from ground to ground, and is passionate about his team, his game, and his club. But it is not just the rugby league that attracts Graham to the Boys Club and the professional club. He feels he is part of the social structure of a network of people and pubs centred on Sudthorpe. In the evening, he goes around a number of pubs in the district, drinking and chatting about the game with other men like him. The pubs he goes in all have some connection with the game of rugby league, whether they run pub teams, or are run by ex-players, or have historical links with the professional club. Graham sees himself as a “Sudthorpe man”, and sees his peers as exemplars of ‘Sudthorpe’ and ‘Sudthorpeness’. Yet Graham has not lived in Sudthorpe for thirty years. As he says

‘Sudthorpe is what I am, I live for Sudthorpe, you can never leave, it’s part of what you are... the rugby, the chat, all that... you know, all my mates, it’s here.’

The idea that the figuration of rugby league in the Sudthorpe district - which is part of the imaginary community of ‘the game’ - is a definer of an authentic Sudthorpe culture and community is one that many of the respondents raised. This definition came in a number of forms. One respondent stated that “rugby league is Sudthorpe, there’s nowt else otherwise”, whereas a fan of the professional club, discussing a black overseas player who had signed from a rugby union background, felt that the player had gained acceptance because “he’s more like a Sudthorpe lad than some of the others [other players]... he dunt mind mixing with the fans, he’s got a bird who lives in Sudthorpe... he loves the place... in the pubs, he’s a right boozier an’

womanizer.” Note that the fan was concerned particularly that some of the professional players did not conform to the ideal of ‘Sudthorpeness’ that he demanded: the social networks around the pubs and amateur rugby league in the district are on the whole removed from the professional club due to the influence of the coach, who has brought Australian coaching methods and new levels of professionalism, creating a tension that is common throughout the imaginary community of ‘the game’.

What these respondents are claiming is that the game of rugby league and their social networks are not just part of the life of the district of Sudthorpe, to all intents and purposes they are Sudthorpe. Such a belief is unsustainable when compared to the external. A walk around Sudthorpe will show that, although pubs and rugby pitches and wastegrounds are prominent, there are still houses and people and shops and football teams and a cornucopia of other cultural sites unrelated to the Sudthorpe the rugby league people claim to define. What they are doing is constructing an idea based on historical traditions, invented or from the real community of Sudthorpe as they perceived it, an idea of an imagined community, of ‘Sudthorpe’, with a concomitant set of values that go to defining belonging, the values of ‘Sudthorpeness’: working class, pub culture, rugby league, ‘northern-ness’, male.

A similar creation of ‘Netherborough’ and ‘Netherboroughness’ occurs at the union club, as mentioned briefly in Chapter Five. Although the discourse is shaped by reference to Netherborough the town, and the respondents perceive the reality of this situation, it is only an internal reality. What they are concerned with is the creation of ‘Netherborough’, which is delineated by rugby union and its imaginary community, and the reading of history they use to legitimate themselves and define their own ‘Netherboroughness’: their own identity, what creates a feeling of belonging.

The creation of a local identity through the invention of tradition, the formation of an

imagined community, and conflation with an imaginary community, is what Graham is talking about when he says Sudthorpe is what he is, what he lives for. Of course, it is not Sudthorpe he is referring to, the locality that exists today as a place within a larger city, but the idea of 'Sudthorpe', the socially created set of shared cultural practices, shared meanings, shared symbols and language that have emerged from this collision between the real, the imagined and the imaginary. It is what semioticians would call a 'phatic' community (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 1994), a group of people related by signs, who know the meaning of those signs, as they create and receive those signs between themselves.

The imaginary community: 'the game'

Populist accounts of discovery tend towards 'eureka' moments. As I was writing this I was reading an account of a supposed neolithic temple site in south west France. The process of discovery reads as a revelation: one moment, the author is struggling to make sense of a local mystery, the next moment he sees the answer as blindingly obvious (Lincoln, 1991: p. 15). My moment in the Archimedean bath was not so clearly marked, yet the theoretical concept of the imaginary community, of 'the game', is the single most important idea in this entire thesis.

What I realised was that whenever the respondents talked about rugby - about how rugby defined them in some way, about how it gave them direction and identity and a feeling of being part of a "worldwide brotherhood", or as the chairman of Netherborough suggested, "[being] one chairman of a small club in one part of this massive body that is rugby" - they were referring not to the governing body or the rules that make up the mechanics of the actual eighty minutes of play, but a community defined by the game (whether it was union or league). This was 'the game', the imaginary community, and the union version was represented strikingly by a collection of shields on the bar wall at Netherborough. They were the shields of clubs from

around the world, from England, New Zealand, Poland, France, Malaysia, Australia, Italy, Ireland, to name those I identified. Many of these were presented after friendly matches, or during off-season tours, but some were collected on private travels or given by collectors. This was a visual representation of 'the game', a sign that showed that the community was not associated with place, but with shared meanings and mutual knowledge (Giddens, 1984) of symbolic boundaries (Cohen, 1986), all of which were associated with the game of rugby union.

'The game' is the imaginary community identified when one respondent at the amateur rugby league club said "I think this game gives people a sense of purpose". It is 'the game' that an ex-player described when he said "I owe a lot to rugby league, it made me what I am today... if I can put anything back into the game I will do". When the first team manager at Netherborough spoke of "this game gives lads great opportunities" and a fan of the professional club said "I've followed this game all my life", and Maurice Lindsay, Chief Executive of the Rugby Football League states that "the game must change to survive", they are all talking about the imaginary community. In Lindsay's case, he is trying to alter the symbolic boundaries, bring new meanings from Australia and the global media (J. Williams, 1994) that may clash (and do: see Chapter Nine) with the imagined aspect of the community, the invented traditions that have defined many of the symbolic boundaries.

In Chapter Five, one can see a clear example of 'the game' in the sense of "brotherhood" and belonging that transcends national borders with the Boys' Club and the French team. Graham is upset because the youngsters have yet to understand they have this imaginary community in common with these mainly rural, mainly Algerian, boys from France. They share 'the game'. The World Cups of both sports showed that disparate nationalities and different cultures can share in the imaginary community, even to the extent of putting aside cultural norms that are associated with place in favour of the stronger symbolic norms that come from 'the

game'. When Morocco played Ireland in the rugby league World Cup, I was able to get access to the post-match celebrations in the bar, where I found some English players who had been on an exchange to Casablanca, two South Africans who had signed for a professional club in this country who spoke Afrikaans politely and quietly in a corner (bemused at their new surroundings), a contingent of French coaches on holiday, and the Irish and Moroccan teams. The Irish, mainly students interested in the athletic, dedicated side of the game, were drinking juice and talking about the violence in the game just played. What surprised me at first was the Moroccan team, who had found the English players who had been on the exchange, and proceeded to join in the drinking and the play fighting and chatting up the female bar staff. The cultural norms associated with Morocco had been superseded by the masculine aspects inherent in 'the game'.

The imaginary community of 'the game' is easier to spot at the women's rugby league team, where the detracting elements of 'Sudthorpeness' are not evident. Their relationship to Sudthorpe is one of convenience. When the secretary of the club decided to form a women's team she wrote to all the local professional clubs looking for support, and only Sudthorpe responded with an offer of the use of their bar facilities (at the time located at a football club). So her team was christened Sudthorpe, and they used a pitch in the district. When the professional club moved its base the women's team relocated to a pub in the district, and now have no connection with the professional club, though they are looking to renew the link through use of the new stadium. What makes the women's team relevant to this point of the discussion is that only one of the squad is from the south side of the city, and she had never watched rugby league until a friend at work (another team member) convinced her to join. The women are dedicated in the sense that Stebbins (1982) describes, and feel a deep sense of belonging. But this belonging is not to the district of Sudthorpe, or any pseudo-Sudthorpe. They explicitly see their sense of

belonging coming from 'the game', though they also feel, as women, they have had to work harder to get acceptance and recognition (see Chapter Seven). As one player explained

'My dad were always a big rugby [league] fan, he took me... when I first thought I'd have a go him and his cronies were like all blokes, y'know, laughing at me, thinking I couldn't do it, but I think I've proved him wrong now... he accepts what I do, and I can mix with 'em now, like I've always been part of all that social circle, but I'm respected more [being a player].'

The symbolic boundaries of the imaginary community are what bind it together, and what cause tensions when the meanings of these symbolic boundaries are questioned. These meanings are what define who belongs and who does not, who is inside and who is outside. The idea of community tacitly creates a distinction between its members and 'the significant other' (Cohen, 1985). So there is a learning process involved, a probationary period which allows a potential member to be enculturated into the meanings. In 'the game', the most important sites for the enculturation of new members are the training pitch of junior clubs, and the terraces during matches. At these sites youngsters are told what is right, what is wrong, and what is to be understood. I asked one teenage player what he had learnt aside from the technical aspects of the actual game by being at the Boys' Club. He replied

'You learn about being part of a team, discipline... pride in playing, what it means to play'. I asked him what he meant by 'means to play', and after some thought he responded: 'What the game's all about, how it's all about being hard, not giving in, out on the field, but you respect them [the opposing team] afterwards, cos... you're all playing rugby [league], you're all friends after.'

The words used by the coaches at the Boys' Club, that stress particular masculine and perceived regional attributes, that stress the imaginary community through talking about the

“spirit” of camaraderie, are also seen on the terraces (Trujillo and Krizek, 1994). It is understood tacitly that ‘the game’ exists: the imaginary community transcends parochial support of particular teams. Rugby league and rugby union supporters, on the whole, tend to identify with their games, and this identification gives them a commonality when faced with potential rivals in opposing supporters. The atmosphere at matches of either code is one of conviviality and friendship, though union is more rarefied and polite. At Netherborough I watched the first team play in a Courage League match and was surprised that the crowd (who numbered approximately five hundred) did not abuse the other team, and some of the older members in the stand clapped a particularly good try by the opposing side. At this match, when some of the players not playing laughed when the opposing fly half made a mess of a conversion, and I could see the members in the stand frown with displeasure. Hence these supporters believe the game is their game, as they use ‘the game’ to define themselves and the world around them.

The imaginary community allows for a flexibility of meaning. The symbolic boundaries are not static structures. Like the figuration described by Elias and Dunning (1986), the imaginary community is a dynamic, and can be challenged and interpreted at a number of levels. Cohen writes

‘Whilst [the imaginary community] might not have the structure or direction which we associate with social movements, it may nevertheless serve a similar need... It is highly symbolized, with the consequence that its members can invest it with their selves. Its character is sufficiently malleable that it can accommodate all of its members’ selves without them feeling their individuality is compromised.’ (1985: p. 108-109)

So ‘the game’ can have different levels of access, as well as struggles over definitions of meaning. For example, one can be a casual fan through the media and the occasional big match of a successful club like Leeds, or an obsessive supporter who devotes their free time to

collecting badges and programmes, writing letters to the governing body and trying to find out the results of the Goroka Highlands (Papua New Guinea) Second Division Cup. Both are members of 'the game', but the second is deeper into the layers of symbolic boundaries: they understand more of the game's meanings than the first supporter. But there can be parallel differentials too: both fans might claim their vision of what 'the game' means is the only valid one, and there will be tension as both fans make that claim and try and make their definitions the dominant form.

The symbolic boundaries are therefore important sites for exploring the imaginary community, and it is their production, maintenance and the challenges over their meaning, that I will now address.

Maintenance of the community: invented traditions

So far I have identified the imaginary community of 'the game'. It is a group of people united in mutual knowledge (Giddens, 1984), who use that shared knowledge to define their social selves and exclude those who do not understand these meanings. Part of that definition of belonging is the use of myths, of a perceived common history, to shape both the symbolic boundaries and the cultural norms of the imaginary community itself.

To return to an issue raised in chapter one, let us consider 'the game' meanings of play the ball, Rorke's Drift and jam eating in rugby league. The play the ball is the technical method of reintroducing the ball back into play after a tackle. For those with a passing knowledge of rugby league the play the ball is seen as something unique to the sport. It is one of 'the game's' symbols, one that has to be understood to get any access to 'the game'. For those who do not know about rugby league, or the difference between rugby league and union, the phrase "play the ball" in print means nothing. Yet for members of 'the game' it is a definer of their game's

distinctness, a specific part of the history of rugby league introduced after the turn of the century to speed up the game and make it more spectator friendly. The sign of the play the ball is a crucial symbolic boundary: the brand label of the rugby league Centenary was a representation of the physical act of playing the ball (Howes, 1995). Yet the play the ball itself has changed as rules and game plans have changed. It is not the physical process that marks “play the ball” as a symbolic boundary, but an understanding of its place in the history of both the game and ‘the game’. Rorke’s Drift refers to the colonial clash popularised in English culture, when a regiment of British Empire soldiers in Southern Africa defeated an army of Zulu warriors in 1879. The impact of this battle in defining British identity as part of an imagined community invested with stories of Imperial glory can be inferred (Anderson, 1983). The film of the battle, *Zulu*, starring Michael Caine, gave rise to the phrase “don’t shoot ‘til you see the whites of their eyes, lads”, an expression used in many other places since: it has become part of the common vocabulary of pretend warfare. I heard the phrase used before an amateur rugby league match, when the coach was encouraging his players to give their all. However, in rugby league Rorke’s Drift has another meaning, another symbol, borrowing the idea of heroic patriotism, but translating it to the third test at Sydney in 1914, when ten battered and bruised British players defeated a full strength Australian side (Gate, 1986b). Knowing these moments in the history of ‘the game’ defines another symbolic boundary of belonging. Finally, jam eating is a curious term of abuse used by Workington fans about Whitehaven, and by Whitehaven fans about Workington: hence the Workington fanzine *Jam Free*. The meaning is accessible only by members of ‘the game’, and the reader of this thesis (jam eating implies they are too poor to have a proper meal - on the terraces, either team’s fans use it to mock the other).

‘The game’ of rugby league - and similarly ‘the game’ of rugby union - can draw upon historical events and historical meanings to define boundaries and define its culture. One

respondent said that “rugby league’s always been about the community, it’s a community sport”.

This community is described as being a northern, urban, working class one. The idea of ‘Sudthorpeness’ is the way the respondents express this historical symbolism. One member of the amateur rugby league club explained that

“Rugby league is a working-class sport, always has been... that’s just the way it is... it attracts working-class folk.” Why it attracted working-class people was addressed by another respondent, who argued that the game itself was designed in a way both to appeal to working-class white men (“working blokes”, as he called them), and over time it had taken values from them and enshrined them in its structure. These he identified as being working class in origin (see Chapter Eight). But on the whole respondents in rugby league and rugby union had a historiography that both legitimised the imaginary communities, but also normalised their values in what Anderson (1983) describes as an imagined community. That is, rugby league was given a heroic history, one of working class struggle and regional self determination (typified by both Moorhouse and Melling), what one respondent identified as “an hundred year fight against those bastards who try and tell yer who’s boss”; whereas rugby union was the bastion of decency, of hard work and fair play, exemplified by the myth of amateurism, discussed by a club member as “the ethos of playing for fun, taking part and enjoying what is after all only a hobby”. If amateurism is the great myth of rugby union, then the imagery of the Split, and the use of its history in defining the imaginary community and tensions within it, is the great myth of rugby league. As such, both deserve mention in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

What these respondents were expressing is a belief in a particular historical myth (Cohen, 1985), a particular use of history. The idea that rugby league becomes an imaginary community called ‘the game’ is different from the idea that rugby league is somehow an expression of a community. Yet the confusion is made precisely because the invented tradition - the belief that

rugby league represents a community - is part of the mythmaking apparatus that legitimises the imaginary community. What happens is that the members of the imaginary community have a particular use for history, and write their history to justify and give coherence to 'the game'. Hence the Split is a creation myth for 'the game' of rugby league, and rugby league writers treat it as such (Delaney, 1984; Roper, 1992; Moorhouse, 1995).

Another aspect of the imaginary community's use of history to define and legitimate itself is through the creation of a sense of unity. 'The game' has an official history (and not the one written by Geoffrey Moorhouse!) that potential members learn through interaction with the members of the imaginary community and its myth creating sources: in rugby league these include the grounds themselves, television programmes, stories such as David Storey's **This Sporting Life** (1960), historical books like Robert Gate's lavishly illustrated book **There Were A Lot More Than That** (1994) about another icon of 'the game' - the 1954 Odsal Cup Replay that attracted over a hundred thousand fans - and the papers and magazines produced by 'the game' for the members of 'the game'. What happens is one gets impressions of the past, invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), images from the past used to write history and define the present. The truth value is irrelevant: what matters is that these histories are for the use of the imaginary community. So they make more real the imaginary community; it is given more solidity, more coherence, and because this history is legitimising and defining the present it is perceived as real by its users. Thus the community is imagined, as Anderson suggests (1983), using invented traditions and shared history to define community and belonging. In rugby league, this imagined community appears not only in 'the game', a multinational yet parochial working class construction, but also in the ideas of 'northern-ness' and 'Sudthorpeness' that arise from the relationship between 'the game' and the region and locality of the fieldwork. Similarly, 'Netherboroughness', the true 'Netherborough' man wished

for in Chapter Five, is an expression of the imaginary community as expressed by imagined, invented traditions.

Maintenance of the community: legitimisation through emic texts

Insider texts, and in particular the media sources that are produced solely for members of 'the game', are important sites for the production and legitimation of a sense of community. While the social interaction within the figurations is the most important site of the symbolic construction of community (Cohen, 1985, 1986), the literature read by the members of the imaginary communities in league and union provides additional coherence. The media in rugby league is particularly important, as two periodicals appear on a weekly basis and provide news and match reports that otherwise would not appear in national newspapers. Being a reporter for one of these papers gave me access and credibility in rugby league circles - my contacts at the professional club, for instance, saw me more as the 'Leaguer reporter' than the 'researcher'. When I spoke to the teenagers at the Boys' Club, I found that they all read at least one rugby league periodical. In a more indepth interview with one of them, I was told

'Yeah, mi dad buys [the Rugby] Leaguer an' [the League] Express every week, an' I always get Open Rugby, just do, cos they're about our game, aren't they?'

Open Rugby, a monthly magazine for rugby league, was mentioned by one of the members of the amateur rugby league club, as being "allright, but it leaves a lot out it could put in... about the amateur game." Overall, though, the respondents I spoke to read one weekly or both, and knew of articles I mentioned in informal conversation from Open Rugby. In the oral culture of the pubs and terraces, these media sources are taken as primary sources with which everyone should be familiar. The result is unreferenced referrals to these sources, in the manner that romantic novelists of the 18th and 19th Century cited classical texts without stating their

source - it is assumed that the listener or reader, as a member of the imaginary community, is familiar with the texts.

Rugby union, while having more monthly magazines than league (at least three, with the possibility as I write of another appearing on the market), does not have any weekly papers. The discourse that defines 'the game' week to week is based on the national newspapers, where there are columnists such as Chris Rea, Alan Watkins, Michael Herd, and Stephen Jones who are given the space to discuss issues in 'the game', whether it be law changes, the failure of Wales (again) or the threat from rugby league/the French/Rupert Murdoch/the schooling system. The people I spoke to at Netherborough were less interested in magazines about rugby union, preferring to read about their game in the newspapers, and to watch the BBC's Rugby Special. They felt they were conversant about 'the game' without recourse to glossy magazines. Some, such as the first team manager and Lee Kirk the student, did read Rugby World, the oldest of the magazines, and copies of Rugby World were available in the gym and in the secretary's office.

Other texts that use the language of 'the game' and contribute to the creation of its symbolic boundaries, in rugby league, include books like Moorhouse's **At The George** (1989), a collection of emotive essays on the culture of 'the game', and Melling's **Surfing The Hurricane** (1994). But the most significant texts are Clayton and Steele's **When Push Comes To Shove** (1993), a collection of vox pops about what 'the game' means to various people, and Hadfield's **XIII Winters** (1994), a more elaborate and personalised version of Clayton and Steele, with most of its contributions coming from writers from Open Rugby.

Because these texts are aimed at members of 'the game', and address issues of interest only to them, it is inevitable they will have an influence on those members, to an extent that some of these texts position themselves on particular sides of debates over meaning, or become gospel texts that are referred to: the final word is often left to a writer, or a publication. For instance,

editorials have an air of finality about them. By way of example, in Rugby World, we are asked

'What is the single biggest problem facing the game of rugby union?... It is the deliberate, wilful killing of the ball in open play...' (Bills, 1994: p. 5)

In Open Rugby, we are told

'Rugby League has finally discovered something we've been trying to say for the past two decades...' (Edgar, 1995: p. 4)

Even the Rugby Leaguer follows the defining language

'[Cold weather] only underlines the common sense in switching the game from winter months to summer.' (Brady, 1996: p. 2)

The legitimisation of the imaginary community through these texts, and the authoritative status these texts claim, provides the opposed definers in the imaginary community sources to bolster their attempts to define the meanings in the symbolic boundaries. They provide differing interpretations of what 'the game' means. Hence Melling and Moorhouse, both members and writers of 'the game', are diametrically opposed over the meaning of 'the game'. The weekly papers of rugby league also reflect this, one only has to look at the two compared on any week: the League Express has critical articles on RFL policy, news from around the globe, and insider gossip, whereas the Rugby Leaguer tends to provide news on player injuries, lower division transfers, and features on amateur clubs.

This role of the media in producing and reaffirming identity will be explored further in the next two chapters.

Tensions: reality v imagined, my game v yours, defining boundaries

The differing editorial styles of the rugby league weeklies are vivid representations of the tension between different interpretations over what 'the game' means. The Rugby Leaguer is the

older of the two weeklies, and has a conservative style and audience. It is marketed directly at the traditionalist, the man (sic) who is interested in the fortunes of his team and the goings on in the amateur rugby league, the side of the tension Moorhouse is associated with at the beginning of the chapter. The League Express, however, was founded in direct opposition to the Leaguer, with a brash editorial that criticised the traditionalists and the administrators. While a change of editor and threats of libel have toned the editorial style down, League Express remains explicitly expansionist and critical. An example of this style is seen in Martyn Sadler's column, in which he is criticising the clubs for being complacent and clueless, and Maurice Lindsay and the RFL for not handling the Super League marketing in a proper manner. In a sweeping statement, he declares that "Jack [Robinson, the chairman of Wigan RLFC] would fail his GCSE in marketing... most people in rugby league... simply don't understand what makes people want to watch professional sport" (Sadler, 1996: p. 4). Again, there is the expression rugby league used in the context of 'the game'.

In the fieldwork, this tension in rugby league appeared as a straight polarisation between 'traditionalists' and 'expansionists', each of whom felt they were the true keepers of the rugby league flame: both sides believed their meanings, their invented traditions, were the true ones that defined 'the game'. The traditionalist view was exemplified by one of the respondents, a coach at the junior club, who said that

'Rugby [league] is going downhill fast... there's people like Lindsay who are doing their best to change everything that this game has got... you can't change what it is, it's a working class, northern game, played and watched by us... I've got nothing against people in Hemel Hempstead, good luck to 'em, but people in Hemel Hempstead are football and rugby union people, that's just the way it is, it's a cultural thing.'

The expansionist point of view, as supported by Open Rugby and the fanzine The

Greatest Game!, can be best seen in the words of a fan of the professional club, who suggested that

'You can't live in the past, the glorious days are not here anymore, Sudthorpe are never going to win the cup... rugby league must expand, it must develop, why shouldn't it? There's nothing in the rulebook that says rugby league can't be played by anyone without a flat cap... Australia shows rugby league can expand, it can be popular, there's no reason kids in London, or Birmingham, or anywhere, couldn't play, except people like Lindsay holding us back.'

To digress briefly, what is interesting is that both sides of the tension feel venom towards the Chief Executive of the RFL, Maurice Lindsay: both believe he is on the other side, a fear that still remains after the Super League debate. The traditionalist/expansionist debate has always been defined by the other, the fear that 'the game' is being controlled by people who wear flat caps/want to level Featherstone to the ground, and only the voice of reason (i.e. the person arguing) can make people see the light. That said, the debate is very real, as it goes to the heart of the meaning of 'the game', and what 'the game' stands for. Hence the argument is about the social identity of 'the game' and the individual identity of those who are members of 'the game'.

At a meeting of the Rugby League Supporters' Association I watched as the future of rugby league was discussed by fans from an eclectic range of clubs, including London. They were keen to show their support of rugby league by wearing playing jerseys from small, southern amateur clubs such as the Aylesbury Bears, or emerging nations such as Ireland and Morocco. At the Boys' Club the expansionist view of 'the game' was in evidence at a meeting to discuss the proposed French visit, in a room surrounded by Pennants, trophies and other items commemorating links with France. At the meeting one of the management committee waxed lyrical about future possibilities - teams from Russia, from Ireland, from Morocco, from Hemel Hempstead.

The traditionalists also wear shirts as badges of affiliation (Casselman-Dickson and Damhurst, 1993), but what teams they 'put on show' are defined by their belief in 'the game' as northern. They religiously wear the colours of their team, or of local amateur teams. When I arrived at Chemicals in a Parramatta Eels jersey I was the victim of a few choice remarks about Australians: though the very fact that the jersey was recognised shows that even the traditionalists are aware of matters in 'the game' pertaining to Australians.

It is clear that the contest between expansionists and traditionalists is a struggle over hegemony within 'the game' of rugby league, where the traditionalists define their meanings through a local discourse and the expansionists define meaning through globalised, hegemonic discourses over the nature of sport. This will be seen in the next two chapters, where expressions of masculinity, class and regionality are discussed in relation to the imaginary community, and these tensions within.

In rugby union, a similar tension over meaning is occurring between the 'amateurs' and what I will refer to as the 'professionals'. The 'amateurs' are those who put the myth of amateurism and the middle class values it implies (Wigglesworth, 1995) before anything else. They see 'the game' as something exclusive, a social club for like minded people, and they abhor the increasing commercialisation and professionalisation that is making 'the game' look to its finances, and become more elite and dedicated in terms of athletic ability. One older member of the union club suggested that

'In my day there was a good spirit in the game, every fellow was given a chance... the warmth has gone from the game these days, the players just want to play and win, there's no club loyalty.'

The feeling among the 'amateurs' at Netherborough is that the 'professionals', who see rugby union as just another athletic sport, and who feel that rugby union has to bite the

professional bullet to survive, have the upper hand. The tension has come to mean a nostalgia for a golden age among marginalised creators of meaning in the sport (Healey, 1991). Using Williams' idea of culture (1977), the 'amateur' in union has become residual, whereas the 'expansionist' in rugby league, especially with the Super League, has become emergent. However, it must be noted that the symbolic boundaries of union, such as the concept of the amateur and the relationship between the sport and the middle class, support a hegemonic reading of union's position with regards to England, where this relationship has been normalised. In the case of rugby league, the 'traditionalists' have what I term present-centred nostalgia. They harken back to the past, but they use that past to define and create their present: it is not enough to remember, the traditionalists want to build the past in the present. Hence the conflation between the perceived real community of historical Sudthorpe, and the idea of 'Sudthorpe' that has become attached to the imaginary community. The tension between the interpretation in 'the game' of what 'Sudthorpe' means and the interpretation of 'Sudthorpe' by people who actually live there is irrelevant: it is as if these people, the inhabitants of the district, do not exist. Or, ironically, if they do exist they are not 'Sudthorpe' people: as one of the committee men of the Boys' Club put it,

'They don't know what Sudthorpe is, they're not interested in rugby [league].'

Community as identity, the community of man

The debate between Melling and Moorhouse has been made clear. It is an argument over meaning in the imaginary community, over what invented traditions count, what ideas of regionality are important: what 'the game' means. It can be seen that the imaginary community helps define ideas of the imagined, the heroic past and the community the respondents refer to in their perceptions of identity. Symbolic boundaries define the community, even to the extent of

visual signs such as replica jerseys, which define levels of involvement in 'the game' (Casselman-Dickson and Damhurst, 1993), hence the uncomfortable feeling of the union members in Chapter Five who saw their players wearing league jerseys. 'Sudthorpeness' and 'Netherboroughness' are a confusion of perceived pasts, values associated with those perceived pasts through the invention of myths and traditions, and the symbolic boundaries and language of the imaginary communities. Hence 'Sudthorpe' becomes a shorthand for the imagined process that legitimises the imaginary community: it gives 'the game' historical roots, whose external truth value is irrelevant. What is important is that the members of 'the game' view both their community, and their history, as real and true.

How the imaginary community is given and uses these so far unexplained values can be explored through concentrating on the concept of masculinity, and how 'the game' makes and maintains male identity. In doing this, the tensions over the meaning of 'the game' will be made more visible, as the expressions of masculinity are contested: in other words, what it takes to be a man will be contested and debated as 'the game' itself is contested and debated. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Seven

Behaviour becoming of a man, becoming a man

'Steel that he was, his courage never failed him, his conquering hand seized many a glorious prize when he came to battle... Thus I salute the hero. - Sweet balm to woman's eyes, yet woman's heart's disease!'

Wolfram von Eschenbach (1200-1210:1980)

In the poem *Parzifal* the aspiring knight is given an image of what it means to be a man, to be a knight. The hegemonic masculinity portrayed is one of nobility, courage and prowess in battle. However, the site of developing and reinforcing this masculinity is not found in war: instead, it is the tourney ground where the allegorical character of the perfect Thirteenth Century noble man is found. In writing his poem, von Eschenbach draws upon the noble culture of his time, writing about the things his audience held to be important in their everyday life. Hence it comes as no surprise to see the conflation of masculinity and the favoured sport of the Thirteenth Century noble man. It is interesting that a similar passage saluting the heroic man appears in a book about rugby league, published seven hundred or so years after *Parzifal*:

'On the turf body stands against body, strength against strength... the logic of pain and violence is different here... the fans cheer their champions and their faith will hold fast the next Seventh Day.' (Clayton and Steele, 1993: p. 163)

The hero is quite clearly being saluted again. Although the cultural gap between Thirteenth Century feudal Germany and Twentieth Century working class Featherstone is enormous, the heroic man whose courage never fails is still seen as the role model for men, and the ideal of feminine fantasy (Easthope, 1986; Hearn, 1989; Horrocks, 1995). The players

are adored by the devoted fans: social nights at the professional club are always well attended by both sexes, and youngsters collect autographs and kudos by talking to the players. Gilmore's *Ubiquitous Male* (1990) is a powerful myth, and the dominance of its norms of behaviour shows that the heroic warrior expression of masculinity in Western culture has, historically, become the hegemonic form of masculinity (Mangan and Walvin, 1987: see also Allmand, 1989, for historical roots). Hence it is no surprise that other masculinities have become marginalised, or feminised (Herek, 1987), as this hegemonic western masculinity is legitimised by recourse to biological and cultural determinism (Goldberg, 1974; Gilder, 1986; Bly, 1990), even though such determinism has been shown to be flawed through research into the social construction of masculinities (Carrigan, Connell and Lee, 1985; Connell, 1995), and the psychological construction of male identity (Stoller, 1985; Easthope, 1986; McMahon, 1993).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the exploration of the social construction of sport and the contingent definition of masculinity is well rehearsed elsewhere (e.g. Messner, 1989; Bryson, 1990; Horrocks, 1995). In the process of my research the concept and problem surrounding masculinity was something that grew out of the fieldwork and my reading. When I started, I was more concerned with class and regionalism. However, it soon became clear that male identity - and how that male identity was expressed, created, maintained and contested - was central to my analysis (Spracklen, 1995b). Following Messner, I wanted to explore how "masculine gender identities develop and change as boys and men interact with the socially constructed world of organized sport" (Messner, 1992: p. 9). Within my theoretical framework, however, the sports in my research are merely cultural trappings that define the symbolic boundaries of imaginary communities. Raphael's thesis (Raphael, 1988: cited in Messner, 1992) that sport is a natural expression of the need for ritual in defining manhood through history comes close to the concept of defining belonging through the symbolic boundaries of an imaginary community, but his

argument is untenable. While Messner criticises it for essentialising sport and manhood, I would argue that any cross historical comparison is internally flawed, since meanings attached to actions and symbols in the past are debatable. The accepted explanation of medieval and renaissance natural philosophy, for example, has changed completely in the last thirty years, is contested even now by new readings of the source material (Pumfrey *et al.*, 1991): the only access we have to the past is through representations made in the past in the form of texts, and archaeological debris.

Messner gives a processual account of masculinity and sport, using as his source athletes in American professionalised and organised sport. He follows a number of themes from boyhood to playing and the meaning of success, injuries and violence, relationships and sexuality, and post-career reflections by the athletes themselves. In asking what it was they took from the sport, how sport developed their sense of identity, and by applying this to a more external exploration of the gender order and social stratification, Messner suggests that

'...masculine identity is neither fully formed by the social context nor caused by some personal dynamic put into place during infancy. Instead, it comes to be in the interaction between the internal and the social.' (1992: p. 23)

The debate over what masculinity actually is, is itself a site of masculine competition and self belief. Confident statements such as Easthope's (1986) masculine imperative in denying the feminine side of Self, Gilmore's (1990) bio-cultural determinism and Messner and Sabo's (1990) social masculinity at the head of the gender order are all problematic in that both masculinity and femininity (which must exist if there is to be gendered identity distinctions) are never clearly defined. In other words, the debate is over the essentiality of the terms, for if the definition of masculinity becomes so loose that it accepts changing forms and different readings of what it is, then its usefulness as a theoretical concept is weakened. From Connell (1995) and Horrocks

(1995) it can be seen that what is at stake is male identity, what defines man, and since men can be many things, there can be many masculinities. However, it cannot be denied that there is a cultural bias within western society towards a patriarchy (MacKinnon, 1989), an institutionalised and normalised gender order that has at its hegemonic site a particular man, a particular reading of masculinity. It is this hegemonic masculinity in the western world that Sabo and Runfola refer to when they state the “primary function of sports is the dissemination and reinforcement of such traditional values as male superiority, competition, work, and success” (Sabo and Runfola, 1980: p. ix). However, the latter half of the sentence does not refer to the hegemonic masculinity, but to how that masculinity is expressed and identified through mutually accepted values. It is a measure of the success of the normalisation of the hegemonic masculinity that the conflation between ‘what it means to be a ‘proper’ man in the male world’ and ‘how ‘man’ and ‘maleness’ is expressed’ remains unexplored.

This chapter makes the distinction between masculinity, where unless specified it is taken to mean the hegemonic reading of what it is to be a man and male identity, and how this masculinity is expressed. How do men hope to express their masculinity, their maleness? How is masculinity’s affirmation and production expressed? By making the distinction it is possible to explore the individual’s creation of male identity, the production and affirmation of the hegemonic masculinity, and how that masculinity is expressed. As discussed elsewhere, in Australia a sports shoe firm ran an advertising campaign using two famous rugby league players (Spracklen, 1995b). The main message was ‘buy these trainers and be a man’. How these trainers and masculinity became conflated in the minds of the receiver was through an identification with these sporting heroes. Laurie Daley suggests that he would not die for his team, but he would go into a coma to help them win: he is creating his own male identity that conforms to the hegemonic social masculinity, and it is expressed through the will to win and the

obliviousness to pain on the sports field. That it is the expressions of masculinity that are at stake is confirmed by the second player, Paul Harragon, who lists the injuries he has received. He is not trying to put off boys from playing rugby league, he is telling them that to be a man one must accept and relish injury as an expression of one's manhood. And the best way to become a man and express manhood is, through the semiotical skill of the advert, to buy the trainers (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 1994).

In the imaginary community of 'the game' of rugby league, and its counterpart in rugby union, the dominant masculinity is the hegemonic one of western society, where men are white, superior and heterosexual. However, how this is expressed can be and is contested by different groups within the imaginary community. This chapter will explore the expressions of manhood and the tensions they support, following the previous chapter's identification of groups within the imaginary communities. Using Messner (1992), similar themes will be elaborated such as relationships within the teams, the will to win, and violence and the pain principle. The chapter will then proceed to explore the challenges and acceptances of the masculine definition of 'the game' by women in 'the game' both on and off the pitch, before proceeding to discuss some aspects of masculine identity: its role at the level of the imagined in creating 'Sudthorpe man', the role of the media, the language of masculinity, and enculturation of boys into the man's world. Finally, the chapter's main findings will be summarised and related to the rest of the thesis and the public debate over performance enhancing drugs.

The professionalisation of the Union and changing expressions

Coaching methods in rugby union in this country are also heavily influenced by the Antipodean style. An increasing professionalisation of the sport, with the introduction of meaningful competition, has led to more effort being put into training and preparing for the

game. The elite rugby union player is now expected to be strong, fast and skillful - they are expected to give full commitment to the sport (Jones, 1994). At Netherborough, this is constantly drilled into the minds of the players, especially when unacceptable jokes at training give rise to a lack of concentration, such as one night when Alan the coach had to lecture his players because they were grumbling about the weather.

Australian rugby union takes much of its shape from rugby league in that country, as the divide is less severe. In the training drills and expectations of commitment Antipodean rugby union borrows from the elite athletic methods that support the expressions of masculinity identified by Messner (1992), such as dedication in the shape of lifestyle changes and dietary requirements, increased training and scientifically derived training programmes, so that the body and mind can be designed for success (Donnelly and Young, 1985; Rowell, 1995). In this country the demands of the Courage League are forcing the implementation of more rigorous regimes, but not without some resistance from the old masculine subculture identified by Sheard and Dunning (1973), where the game was secondary to the social network and drinking rituals that surrounded it. These older expressions of male identity are also vividly described in **Mud In Your Eye** by Chris Laidlaw (1974), who describes masculine japes, sexual pranks and bouts of heavy drinking as part of the spirit of rugby union, part of the bonhomie of (male) team bonding. A similar social culture based around team bonding through alcohol and expressions of masculinity associated with it are found in North American rugby as a direct act of resistance against the professionalism of North American sport (Donnelly and Young, 1985). What it means to be a man in North American rugby is best described by Sheard and Dunning (1973), not Messner (1992).

At Netherborough rugby union club, this tension between different expressions of masculinity was expressed both as a regret that the old ways were going, but also with a realistic

acceptance that the game had to be taken seriously. The club, as discussed in Chapter Five, have had to come to terms with their position as a medium sized rugby union club surrounded by larger union clubs, and league and soccer teams. With the advent of leagues in rugby union the club, who were always perceived as less important than other union clubs in the area, are trying to establish themselves as a prominent northern club. However, with the onset of professionalism this has brought tension between ideas of success and commercialisation, and the old idea of the players' club. They know they could go down the leagues and become a tiny regional club as well as go up and face the elite clubs. As the club chairman (sic) said

'I do think we have to be aware of what's needed to be a successful club. Do we allow our standards to drop? I think we can have a balance, between the playing side, which after all is what counts... and the social life of the club.'

The balance becomes one between differing expressions of masculinity, differing accounts of what one has to do to conform to the hegemonic ideal of western masculinity. The importance of the playing side means that it is the success of the team that is at stake: in this the expressions of masculinity identified by Messner (1992) based around the will to win are important. However, one can see that at Netherborough there is some concern that the social life of the club, the "spirit of the club" as another respondent suggested, is not removed by this emphasis on changing expressions of hegemonic male identity. There are still adherents to the ideas of masculinity expressed through socialising and bonding in the bar (Sheard and Dunning, 1973).

Another respondent, one of the supporters of the club not associated with the playing or committee side, suggested that "what we want to see is Netherborough playing Bath". When I asked him why he answered "so we can show them sailors how to play rugby". In other words, this respondent was more concerned with the success of the club, which he linked with

masculine pride in beating a southern team associated with success and elitism. Bath was seen to be a club for “sailors”, a reference born of homophobia: Netherborough, then, would show the outsider what it was to be a proper man, and precisely because Bath in his eyes were outsiders, they became marginalised and associated with a masculinity that was not hegemonic.

The tension between expressions of masculinity has become a problematic which the playing side is aware of. One player, nearing the end of his career, had accepted that “if I want to carry on another two years I’ll have to get serious”. The director of rugby was more explicit

‘I think, especially on away trips, the lads like to let their hair down and have a few drinks... we have gone overboard at times ... [laughs]... quite a few times actually! But you’ve got to see it in perspective... the lads train hard, they build up to the match and give their all... they wouldn’t be in the firsts if they were just interested in a few beers.’

One can see that at Netherborough the dominant expression of masculinity is one of success, hard work and overcoming tough conditions. The club train twice a week, running through stamina work and set moves, as well as weights in the players’ own time at the club gym. In Chapter Five I presented a vignette taken from the ethnographic fieldwork that highlighted this tension in commitment to training. While the team captain and the older players are more concerned with the actual playing and socialising, players like Jason and Rob see in the weights room a chance to improve their performance, confirm their masculinity, and make their bodies conform more to the masculine ideal typified in (sporting) society (Bourdieu, 1988; Connell, 1990; Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner, 1992; Rail and Harvey, 1995). There is a certain homoeroticness about the appreciation of the body (Klein, 1986), which comes out in the support Rob is giving to Jason and the seemingly unfriendly joke about the weight not being heavy. Suggestions of weakness and femininity are bantered around the gym to suggest and exaggerate their heterosexual male identity, which is bolstered by competition between who can

lift the heaviest or the longest. The undercurrent, however, remains, and is typified by the homophobic caption placed alongside the picture discussed in Chapter Five. Rob, the player who was helping Jason, told me in the middle of an interview, that “I come here because you can’t be sure about what some blokes are after at a gym”. The tension between expressions of hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity and homoerotic pride in the male body is one that is evident.

The first team manager, speaking of the gym, explained how it represented a shift in the expression of masculinity within the club

‘At one time no club would’ve had a gym... it was just a quick game and a laugh with yer friends... but we’re attracting new players who don’t want that. They want to play rugby at a top level, and don’t mind putting in the hard work.’

Netherborough’s players are, I assert, seeking in the game an affirmation of their masculine identity. The older generation’s means of expressing masculinity in heavy drinking and lewd behaviour remains to some extent in the homophobia and sexism that consists of most of the jokes told at training, but the old committee men are torn between a worry that the social base of the club is declining and the desire not to lose status in the leagues. Most of the players no longer come from the Netherborough area, and they can be considered as undertaking ‘serious leisure’ (Stebbins, 1992). But through the competition to see who can lift most in a bench press, and the desire to play hard and “knock them (the opposition) to the ground whenever you can get away with it”, they remain secure in their masculine identity.

The junior side of the club is organised through the director of rugby in his other role as youth development officer. The club used to co-operate with the grammar school, whose players automatically joined the club colts, but they are finding that this progression no longer works. “They’re just not interested in rugby today,” said the club chairman, speaking of the boys at the

grammar school. One ex-player was more direct in his scorn: “they’re all puffs are the teachers up there,” he said, expressing a scorn for masculinities not hegemonic. What really concerns these two is that their masculinity is being challenged by being denied at the learning stage - they fear the other and reaffirm their own masculinity by dismissing the other as effeminate (Whitson, 1990). The gender order is reinforced by the intervention of the club’s youth schemes and development officer. Although there is some attempt to involve women through a coaching position, and girls through mini-rugby, these are token efforts. The junior section is controlled through an all-male committee, which reports to the all-male club committee. Club affairs are controlled by men, with the Ladies Committee resembling a place to put helpful wives who will run the shop, make the sandwiches, and sit quietly in the stand, supporting the present gender order (Connell, 1987). The director of rugby gave clear indication of how he approaches youth development, when he recited the following tale in the bar, about a former club

‘They had it right... no fucking nonsense... they had the boys [note no girls] out running on the moor in the middle of winter... a three mile run just to warm up. One night one lad was bitten by a snake and bloody hell he was crying and screaming [laughs] said an adder had bitten him. Terry [presumably the coach of the youth side] told him if he didn’t get up right that minute they were going to leave him on the moor... the poor bloody boy blubbered all the way back and they never saw him again [laughs].’

For one boy an attempt to assert the hegemonic masculinity, to be proud as a man, was scuppered because he did not meet the expectations of the teacher. To cry is a sign of sissiness - pain has to be endured, and to show weakness marks the unfortunate down as not quite a proper man (Messner, 1992). By this indication one must surmise that enculturation into the hegemonic masculinity still occurs by the weeding out process and glorification of strength, winning and pain tolerance from an early age. This theme will be taken up again at the end of the chapter.

When players have injuries at the Netherborough club, they are encouraged to recount the details in the bar at a later date. For the committee and the supporters a player injury comes as a disappointment: the feeling of remorse is more so for the loss to the team rather than the hurt to the player. This is also true of the attitude of non-players in the rugby league area of Sudthorpe. For the player himself, there is also the feeling that the side has been let down. One ex-player said “when I did my collarbone I was gutted. I mean, I knew it wasn’t anyone’s fault... its just part of the game.... but I felt restless watching the lads from the stand, I wanted to get back on the pitch, back with the lads... there’s nothing like team spirit, I can’t explain what it is, but you know you haven’t got it when you’re up there and they’re down there [on the pitch]”. The team spirit, the belief in the value of male company, the quest for success, the self-affirming power of fighting alongside close friends in a struggle to see who is hardest and win the game, the bonding of post-match socialising, the them-and-us mentality of jokes and remarks about women, sexual prowess and the marginalising of those not good enough to be in the team as softies or queers: these are all facets of the gender order tied up with the game and the thing which the player missed when sidelined. He missed the reassurance of being what he thought was a proper man.

Away from the pitch the club serves as an important centre of producing and maintaining male identity through its function as a social club for local businessmen and their friends. On an average night during the week the club bar is quiet and dominated by middle aged men. Some of these are ex-players, but a sizeable number are merely members who have taken advantage of the bonding and male companionship of the club. In the bar they meet business contacts, make informal deals and catch up with gossip from around the town. The bar is a political site, where these men define both their male identity and local discourse. It is a gentlemen’s club, an exclusive (members’ only) place for these men to relax and talk business and sport. Women are

not banned from the bar, but apart from the weekend or on special events women are not usually present. As one respondent suggested

'I come here to get away from the wife.'

Another explained that the bar was "the only place in Netherborough you can get a decent whisky without some jukebox blaring in your ear."

For these men the bar has become an important place to reaffirm their male identity, both through the masculine discourse and comparison with the others in the bar, to the drinking and attachment to the male environment of the rugby club. As such, sexual innuendo and sexual jokes are commonplace. The bar staff are a mixture of male and female throughout the week, and the small talk at the counter is defined by their gender. The men behind the bar invariably are asked about the team's chances or some other sporting question, whereas the women are either treated over respectfully or are 'complimented' on how nice they look.

Rugby League and Pub Culture

Rugby league has always been associated, in this country, with industrialised areas of the north of England, and the working classes within those areas. As part of this association perceived values that come from that working class have been adopted by people in 'the game', so that in their minds rugby league is not just an expression of its history and historical roots, it is a living embodiment of them. Hence Clayton and Steele (1993) is illustrated with grainy black and white photographs that focus on mud, steam, injury, and working-class pride (see Chapter Eight). These pictures are not historical pictures, nor are they pictures commissioned by national newspapers seeking to make fun of the north, they are pictures put in the book to reflect a living culture. Associated with this traditionalist view of rugby league are traditional expressions of masculinity.

On one occasion, I was standing with a group of ex-players and supporters at a bar. They were all men, and between pints the conversation was becoming fierce, as they argued which player was the 'hardest' of two well known forwards. The argument revolved around a number of themes which were interchangeable - they were so interrelated the people arguing used them seemingly at random. One minute it was prowess on the field, tackling ability and 'hardness', then it was how much beer they could sup, then it was their usefulness in a fight. Then the argument moved onto their looks, and one of the players in particular was singled out as being "an ugly fucker". When the argument died down with both sides claiming victory and buying more beer, I was told not to put the accusations of ugliness in my thesis because I "wunt want to upset 'im".

Hence, although rugby league has always been seen as a 'hard' game for men, players were supposed to reflect the working class man who watched from the terrace. Training was seen as a matter of being prepared, and far more important was courage during the eighty minutes. A man was supposed to be able to suffer the violence and potential injuries without dedicating most of his time to improving his body - the masculine culture was typified and caricatured excellently by David Storey in the book and film **This Sporting Life** (1960). Players were supposed to be normal men, who liked a bit of a scrap and a drink, and who avoided hard work if at all possible, except where that work was tied up with masculine pride. As Machin, the main character says in the book,

"Stars! We don't have stars in this game, just people like me." (Storey, 1960)

In **Power at Play** (1992), Messner discusses the Lombardian ethic, the commitment to victory at all costs that has come to dominate American professional sport. Named after Vince Lombardi, a football coach who reputedly claimed "winning isn't everything - it's the only thing", the Lombardian ethic defines and describes a particular approach to achieving success

that incorporates professionalised training and conditioning procedures, as well as anything else that can be achieved without punishment to give a player or team the “edge”. Hence, both illegalities on the pitch and the use of performance enhancing drugs are part of the Lombardian ethic, as long as players and coaches feel they can get away with it.

The Lombardian ethic reached the game of rugby league in 1982, when the Australian Kangaroo touring side swept the British challenge away without breaking sweat (Fitzpatrick, 1994). The shock of heavy defeat caused a revolution in British rugby league coaching methods - the trappings of the traditional masculinity of the game, such as the heavy drinking, the lax attitude to training and the casual attitude to violence were thrown out as the game became more professional. Coaching methods were inspired by the Australians (Larder, 1988), who in turn owed their American style ultra professionalism to the working relationship between influential coach Jack Gibson and Vince Lombardi himself (Masters, 1990). Gibson was the mentor of a new wave of Australian coaches, including John Monie who was responsible for the phenomenal success of Wigan. Yet, although the old working-class expressions of masculinity were rejected at the top level, the new ethic gave the prospective player another way to affirm his masculinity through the will to win and dedicated training to achieve that success. These attitudes to win at all costs and ignore the consequences are expressions of masculinity explored in great detail by Messner (1990, 1992). The Australianisation of rugby league is effectively Americanisation through the back door (McKay and Miller, 1991). In other words, attitudes to the ethos of sport, of professionalism, commercialisation (Alt, 1983; Saeki, 1994) and the pursuit of success, that inspired the Australian Rugby League (Lester, 1988; Lynch, 1993) are attitudes borrowed from American team sports such as gridiron football. One only has to see the rush by English rugby league teams to find nicknames: the Cougars, the Bears, the Hawks, the Reds, the Raiders, the Eagles. In Australia this marketing strategy was adopted in the early eighties, following the

overtly masculine style of gridiron football.

However, although the ideal masculine type's expressions have changed, the importance of rugby league in maintaining and reproducing the hegemonic masculinity found in the gender order remains. That said, like the expressions of masculinity at the union club, there are tensions over what expressions are the 'correct' ones within the imaginary community. The Australianisation of 'the game' is at odds with the invented traditions that stem from the imagined identity with a working class, northern community. Tied up with this resisting aspect of the imaginary community are different expressions of what it means to be man. These contested expressions relate to the tension in the imaginary community discussed in Chapter Six between 'traditionalists' and 'expansionists'. As one expansionist explained, "look at what the Ozzies have done, and look at what's happened here, there's no question of who's best for rugby league". This argument is based on the results of rugby league's marketing strategy in Australia, which has seen the game spread across the country and compete for sponsorship, airtime on television and spectators with Australian Rules football. But it can be argued that rugby league, historically, always was the dominant sport in New South Wales and Queensland (Moorhouse, 1989).

In Sudthorpe, the expressions of masculinity identified at the union club re-appear. But here the old working class expressions of masculinity survive as part of the value system of the imaginary community. It is expressed in the pub culture that surrounds the game in the area - and although the Lombardian ethic has been absorbed into the game it has become a part of this original value system, so that unlike Netherborough there is less tension between old beer drinkers and young athletes. One Sudthorpe born player, now an international, is renowned for his love of ale. At the Boys' Club boxing night, "(he) arrived pissed out of his brain with all his drinking mates from the pub, and he would've been kicked out if everyone else hadn't been two

sheets to the wind too". What makes this anecdote more revelatory is that he was playing in a televised cup fixture the next day, in which his team won comfortably. Drinking and the pub culture remain a strong part of the Sudthorpe rugby league scene. Alcohol is seen as a natural part of the respondents' lives, they see the pub as an essential place in their social life based around rugby. As one of the amateur rugby league players put it

'I think everyone likes a few beers, I mean it's something everybody's done, got rarsed on a big night out... it's good to go out and get pissed with people you can talk to.'

Another respondent described how he went into various pubs in the area to "catch up with rugby talk", and that "you meet people who've not been to rugby [league] since [the old club folded], going out's their way of following rugby [league]". His observations were supported by both my own and those of other respondents such as Graham, who is a regular in the pubs. There are a number of pubs, as mentioned in Chapter Five, that have mainly male clientele, where the conversation is dominated by rugby league, whether it be Sudthorpe or the City's largest professional club, or one of the amateur teams, all of which save Chemicals are based at a pub. At one pub in the district, where a Sunday League side is based, the walls are covered with old photographs from rugby league's past, as well as other items of memorabilia such as posters and a framed jersey donated by a famous player whose brother plays for the team. The landlord is an ex-professional player, and his manager is one of the players in the team. With a limited choice of drinks (bitter, lager or stout) and regulations concerning the non-admittance of children it is not a family pub, and on an average night the public bar is full and the lounge is empty (it is a peculiarity of English pubs that the public bar is tacitly accepted as the domain of 'regulars' and locals, whereas the lounge is the 'open' space). In the public bar the talk is of the weekend's match, girlfriends and wives, and rugby league in general. Admittance into conversation there is only possible if one can talk about 'the game' and show that one is

both a man and a member of the imaginary community. It is in the pubs as much as the training pitch that the old expressions of masculinity are reinforced and reproduced.

Drinking, where ribald jokes are told and sexual liaisons recalled, and where tough matches are remembered, is one part of the structure supporting the hegemonic masculinity within the imaginary community. The pub culture plays an important part for supporters and followers of 'the game', as drinking with their friends is a chance to prove their ability to 'take' their beer and at the same time discuss the game in the language of masculinity. The players, too, use drinking and the sexual aggression it creates. Before one match at the amateur club I heard songs by The Macc Lads being played, a band whose songs revolve around masculine bravado, sexual conquest, drinking, fighting and homophobia. To one song, with an easily remembered chorus, the players sang along:

'Just find us a pub

Where the ale and tarts are free

Lock that fucking door

We'll drink beer to eternity.'

The world of the song is the ideal for the players. One professional said that "I love this game, and not just the playing... I'm an ugly fucker but when everyone's had a few the lasses are all over me, not for my looks, no fucking way!". The after match drinks and the socialising are important for the players, who see getting drunk as another way of supporting their male identity, hence the increasing amount of sexual tales that occur when the players are drunk. But the sexual banter is not necessarily connected to drink: in the changing rooms the banter is just as sexual (Curry, 1991). At the amateur club players constantly refer to others as "smallcocks" or "virgins", at the same time exaggerating their own sexual ability. Poor performances or reticence to join in the jokes and drinking is seen as challenging the accepted norms of expression of

masculinity, and those who break these rules are often seen as “bumboys”, or the “quiet fuckers” mentioned in Chapter Six (Connell, 1990; Messner, 1992).

Although drinking is related to the game, it is in the game itself that most of the aspects of masculinity are stored and produced. Being “hard”, being a man on the field who is not afraid to give and take violence, is at the heart of the expressions of masculinity in the game itself, which are used by the players to confirm their maleness, and also by the spectators who relate to and identify with the players. As one supporter explained

‘I’d die for Sudthorpe, to play for them... I can only admire the strength and skill, they’re supreme athletes... [one player], the amount of work he does to keep his jersey, the shit he takes from other players just cos of his reputation... I think he takes more than he gives.’

This connection between ‘the game’ and masculinity is made by non-players, who observe routinely how “hard” players are, and how ‘the game’ is for “men”, not boys, women or “queers”.

Another said that “they’re out there fighting for me”. The success or failure of the team helps shape the social masculine identity of the supporters and the administrators, who in the words of one respondent treat the players as “my boys”. So the administrators become father figures, watching their sons become men, while the supporters see in the players their champions, who are surrogate icons of the supporters’ own masculinities.

However, it is the actual players who suffer. As Jimmy Cross, an ex-Chemicals player told me “rugby’s not a game for blokes who are scared of taking knocks... if you think you’re gonna break your jaw or your arm you shunt be out on the pitch”. In other words, it is the sheer physicality of the game that makes it a man’s game - one where only the toughest survive. He described how, when an elbow from another player depressed his temple and caused a shockwave to powder his jaw, he continued playing. “It hurt fucking bad, but I wanted to stay

on. I carried on playing for ten minutes until I was dragged off... I wanted to get back on”.

Allowing for exaggeration, Jimmy Cross demonstrates how the processes behind this affirmation of masculinity work. As Sabo and Runfola (1980) demonstrate, overcoming pain is seen as a sign of manhood. He also wanted to stay on, because the game was important to him. He wanted to win, he wanted to give his all for his team: this is what he learnt which makes him a man (Messner, 1992). It also demonstrates the lazy attitude to violence and injury, where it is seen as a vital part of the game. It can also be seen as a strategy in achieving success, as Jimmy demonstrated:

‘(One player I knew was) a five pointer [in the days of three points for a try and two for a goal]... whenever he played we knew we’d got an advantage... he went round giving their side a crack... once we were in the County Cup against a team from Hull, and they had a front row that were knocking the shit out of us, so Clive walloped them all through t’game. When we played the next tie [the replay] they’d chickened out, and didn’t play.’

Rugby league is, for the players and the fans who identify with those players, a hard and violent game. The biggest cheers are for when fights start, and one old fan complained that “they’ve made it soft now that they’re stopping fights, it’s a game for men, not babies, it’s only letting off steam... it’s nowt malicious”. Even though his perception that the game is less violent supports the argument surrounding Australianisation, the enjoyment of fighting and the “hard” aspect of the game is still evident. One player at the professional club spoke of “it’s all about given them a pop, you know they’ll do it to you, so you’ve got to get yours in first”. The coach at Chemicals explained that “there’ll always be a bit of rough and tumble, that’s what the game’s about, you can’t stop it... what’s the difference between driving your forearm into someone’s ribs [legal] and cracking them one on the nose [illegal]?”. There is a perception that the hardness of the game comes before the safety of the players, and this is something some of the players are

proud of. An international with years of experience said that he could “hold my head up high, having been through things your normal bloke in the pub wouldn’t survive through”.

His thoughts about the sheer physicality of the game of rugby league are vividly supported by the faces of rugby league players. Many have broken noses, others are scarred all over. The physical act of running at speed into another two players, who do all they can to drag the attacker to the floor, is potentially extremely dangerous. It is uncommon, but not unusual, to see players stretchered from the field. Superficial injuries such as gashes that need stitches, are so common they are hardly mentioned in the press, only as a statistic if a ‘blood-bin’ substitution is made. Yet the dirty players, ones who are seen as a team’s “hard men”, are often the favourites of that team’s supporters. At one professional match, when a Sudthorpe player was kned in the stomach and whose face was then crushed into the soil, the sin-binning of the offender elicited chants of “There’s only one [dismissed player]!” from his side’s supporters. It seems to be a facet of the match that the fans, if not the administrators who make edicts condemning violent play, want to see.

The violence is also described in an almost celebratory way in some of the popular literature, such as Clayton and Steele (1993). In Storey (1960), the story is told of a hooker who has his nose broken by the ‘hero’, who is on the same team and is aggrieved that the hooker has not given him a pass.

Biographies of players are usually dull recitals of matches and friends. The masculine ideal of “my lovely wife” has become a cliché regularly trotted out, even when other parts of the biography tell of blokeish escapades of drink, sex and hotel rooms (e.g. Worthington, 1994). One biography that is relevant to research into ‘the game’ is, however, more analytical, that of ex-Hunslet and Workington player Cec Thompson (Thompson, 1995). In the self penned book he describes how he was routinely subjected to the violence of the field. Being a black player, he

was seen as an easy target when he first turned out in the late forties, but the social bonding of the team supported him when things became rough. Having proved his manliness by taking his punishment and turning into a good, strong player, he found his team mates acting as minders on the field. On reflecting on his career, he writes

'some of the players thought I must be gay (because of his initial fear and real name Cecil), which is not a reputation anyone would want in professional rugby. Yet though they were a tough bunch... I shall be indebted to them for the rest of my life. They were hard but courageous and generous too. Because they knew I always gave my best on the field, they looked after me. A player can easily be hurt (if) there is a collision between an opponent's fist and your face, but my team mates always protected me from unfair play... twelve of my mates would retaliate if I went down. It gave me a hugely comforting feeling.' (Thompson, 1995: p. 25)

It is pertinent to this exploration of male identity that the homophobia attached to unusual people and those who do not fit occurred in Thompson's case. In his description of the events on the pitch, there is an acceptance that violence was a normal part of the game. Also, one can see that he sees the game as a rite of passage, a place that turned him from an outsider labelled as gay to an insider man.

Another ex-player, who played for Sudthorpe and at international level, had similar feelings on reflection. Having had a rough childhood, he found his maleness confirmed by his prowess and his survival on the pitch, and he was accepted into the masculine network of Sudthorpe by the players who supported him through their masculinity. The players and the team spirit of 'the game' provided him with a family, a support network that helped him define his identity. He remains close friends with the Sudthorpe ex-players and supporters, but his move away from the game into other social circles has allowed him to take a critical view of those still

inside 'the game'. For all the nostalgia for the game that made him a man, that made him accepted by the people of Sudthorpe, he still described it as "a cruel, inhuman thing... it takes people and rips them up... it is so sad seeing what has happened to them (his team mates)... they are still in Sudthorpe, they have nothing except constant pain from their injuries... it is an injustice to humanity". Clearly he has reassessed his own identity, and rejected both the hegemonic masculinity of western sport and the old, dominant working-class expressions of masculinity in rugby league in Sudthorpe.

Such rejections of the hegemonic masculinity remain rare within 'the game'. In the course of my research I did not find anyone willing to criticise 'the game's' implicit connections with the hegemonic masculinity. That is not to say people cannot find other masculinities confirmed through 'the game', or cannot criticise masculine expressions in 'the game'. Ian Roberts, a famous international player in Australia and a forward known for his aggression and determination, posed nude for an Australian gay magazine before coming out in public after a Grand Final match in which his team, Manly (not a joke), lost. His sexuality was known beforehand by his team mates, and there is no doubting he saw that his lifestyle as a rugby player helped define his identity and masculinity, even though it did not conform to the hegemonic heterosexual masculinity discussed in this chapter. In an article in *Open Rugby* (Gibbons, 1995) which discussed his coming out the issue was free of any heterosexual disgust, and fairly reported (although the editorial team could not resist using a picture of Roberts with two female models from publicity for the 1994 Kangaroo tour). It can only be hypothesised that there is gay involvement in rugby league and rugby union, given research into other sports (e.g. Pronger, 1990) and the highly masculine and body appreciative aspects of these games. However, they are marginalised in the imaginary community to such an extent they remain invisible. On referring to Roberts' sexuality, I was told by one of my friends within 'the game' that it was a joke: there

was no way, in his eyes, that any league player could be homosexual. Or as a friend said before Roberts came out:

'Rugby [league]'s for real men, do you know what I mean?'

That those words could mean quite another thing for gay men was not realised by this respondent.

The Australianisation of 'the game' has had an effect on the attitude to violence. Some of the younger players I spoke to realised that dirty play was ruining the game, and were supportive of attempts by administrators to "clean up" the game on the pitch. They felt that training, dietary supplements and even abstention from alcohol were things that were necessary if they were to be professional players. One of the youngsters at the junior club, said "the days of supping ale are over, you can't do that anymore, you've got to be fit not have a beer belly". Instead of drinking and fighting, and dodging hard work, players are expected to look after themselves and put all their effort into retaining their positions in the teams. An ex-player from the professional club explained that this professionalism could make or break a career. He suggested

'This game's changed, it's got so that you've got to work, work, work, to keep your place... when it's your livelihood any failing's gonna change your life, cos there's always some kid in the Alliance after your place who's five years younger and two seconds faster. If you don't work you're out. Some can handle that... I realised I wasn't gonna do that, I couldn't put the work in, that's the way it is.'

He chose to give in as a player, though he was still a keen fan of the amateur game. The increased professionalism and new expressions of masculinity did not work for him. Others too had their doubts over the tension between the demands of the Lombardian ethic and what that entailed for their maleness, and what they had grown up understanding. As one player said

succinctly, “when yer putting yer body on t’line fer beer tokens you’ve gotta wonder why”. The physicality of the sport was an issue in his mind that he had not come to terms with. However, the players who have been enculturated into the new professionalism find their masculinity expressed in the commitment and win at all costs mentality:

‘As a pro it’s part of yer job, you take the knocks on the chin, it’s survival of the fittest... when you’ve put in the work, the training, it’s all come down to that eighty minutes, and you’re one out of thirteen... if it means you have to put your body on the line, for your mates, to win, that’s what you’ve gotta do.’

Women in ‘the game’: the man’s view

Rugby league is seen by the people in the social network as a man’s game. Although women’s rugby league is established in Sudthorpe, the club is small and not supported in the same way as a top amateur club like the Chemicals. It has had a precarious life in the small Women’s Rugby League, and is seen by many of the Sudthorpe men as something of a joke, a game for “fat women and lesbians”, as one ex-player and supporter described it. The coach of the professional club was more reflective on the women’s game, though he had reservations of why women wanted to be involved:

‘Rugby league’s a game for everyone... but it’s a man’s game, the rules were designed with strong blokes in mind, not lasses.’

There was a contradiction between his first comment, the ‘party line’ trotted out regularly by the Rugby Football League, and his fears about the game being too hard for women. In effect, rugby league was, in his eyes, a game for everyone - but everyone didn’t include women. Other respondents casually refer to players as lads, or talk about the average fan as “the working man”. In related research (Long *et al.*, 1995), a quantitative study revealed that around

thirty percent of spectators at professional matches were women. Prolonged ethnography reveals that women do attend matches and support rugby league, but the proportion of women decreases from pro matches to amateur level. The professional club has women of all ages supporting it, from young girls with their families to old women who remember the “Glory Days”. At the Chemicals, women are mainly girlfriends and wives, who serve the same tea making and kit washing function as the ladies committee of the union club. There is a belief prevalent that women want to watch rugby, both union and league, to look at men, at “bloke’s bums”.

The most visible representation of male feelings towards women in ‘the game’ is the response to women physios. Netherborough rugby union club employ a woman physio, which the players found amusing both in social banter in the gym and changing room, and in conversation with me. The players I spoke to all smiled when I asked if they saw the physio as a problem. One said there was no problem at all, while another suggested that

‘I’d rather have my legs rubbed by her than a bloke anyday.’

In rugby league there are an increasing number of female physios, but this does not stop the banal joke from somewhere in the crowd whenever a female physio goes onto the pitch about groin injuries. At one match I heard someone shout after a female physio “come over ‘ere, luv, I’ve got a sprained knob”, and at the amateur club one of the players expressed his disappointment that they did not have a female physio, to which one of the coaching assistants replied if they did, “you lot would be getting cramp all the fucking time”. The female physio is seen as a joke, a sexualised employee of a club who, although providing vital support for a team, is objectified by male supporters and players.

Women in 'the game': accepting the gender order

At the professional club women such as Helen Lane are, as supporters, close to the administration of the club, helping to sell lottery tickets and being consulted by the secretary, who only joined the club recently. Helen is the longest serving helper at the club, yet as a fan she is denied access to greater control of the club's affairs. The secretary and the board, and the entire coaching staff, are men. Similarly, the head of the unofficial supporters club, and the club historian/programme editor are men. The pro supporters who are also connected in some way to the amateur scene in the area are all men.

Women are allowed into 'the game' but have a strict place in the gender order. They can watch the matches from the terraces, and in this role they are part of 'the game'. But their access to positions of power or their involvement beyond passive support is discouraged. While Helen's work in raising funds is appreciated it does not earn her respect or give her a greater responsibility at the club. A similar situation occurs at the union club. A female member and chair of the Ladies Committee has a coaching certificate but is only allowed to coach mini rugby to young children. She told me this was because

'None of the blokes wanted it, they all felt a woman could be a mother figure... I think they were scared because there are girls [it is a mixed squad at under ten], they don't want to be seen coaching girls.'

However, she feels the framework of the club, which is weighted towards the all male committee and the all male first team squad, is justified because "rugby [union] is, if you want to talk about sport, rugby is more for men... it's a man's hobby, that's just the way it is... I love rugby [union], but I'd never play it, men are built for it, women aren't."

Some women, however, do feel they have a greater role in these male sports, and some

play too.

Women in 'the game': challenging assumptions

In Sudthorpe itself there is a women's rugby league team, as mentioned earlier. It is an amateur club whose social base is one of the pubs in the district which also runs a male open age amateur team. However, it trains at a council sports centre just outside the district, and plays at the same site as the Chemicals club.

They train just as frequently as the Chemicals, yet when it comes to priority when there is a clash over the pitch it is the men who are deemed more important. This is one of the issues that the women at the club discuss frequently, along with the poor quality of refereeing that they feel they receive. As one respondent put it, "they seem to think we can be pushed around cos we're only women."

The fact they are women is the cause of many obstacles put in their path. They feel that the authorities and the local league officials look on them as "odd women out of their place", which runs counter to their desires, which is to be treated merely as "rugby players". One of the women at the club is an international and committed to working hard. She has a specific training and conditioning programme as part of her international duties, and fits her working hours around what is in effect a professional schedule. On one occasion she had to be at a training ground near Doncaster for a seven a.m. start, two hours after she had finished a night shift at her place of work. As she said

'Women's rugby league gets no favours from anyone, we have to raise all our funds, organise ourselves... some of the officials at WARLA [Women's Amateur Rugby League Association] are no better, they think we shouldn't kick up a fuss, we shouldn't want to be treated as any other players.'

The Sudthorpe women's team was formed by this respondent when she left a team on the other side of the city which was run by a man. Although she said the reason she left was over his old fashioned coaching methods, it is clear the women who followed her from the old team were happy that the new club was controlled and organised by a woman. The international convinced the professional club to help them with social facilities for a season, and as such they took the name Sudthorpe, and in keeping with other women's teams took an Australianised nickname. This nickname, however, is a feminised derivative of the usual nicknames based on hunting animals. Given the amount of interference and obstructions she and the team have received in the way of patronising referees who "tell us they'll bend the rules to make it easier", journalists who "want to use us as a joke about women and scrums", and men who "think we shouldn't play their game" and "think we're all lesbians and butch women", there is still a tacit acceptance of their role in 'the game'. In feminising their name and accepting their place, the respondent who formed the team uncomfortably accepts the male dominance of 'the game'. As another respondent explained

'It is not a game that's prepared for women... they're alright to wash the kit and pick up their husband when he's had a drink with the lads... [but] if they do get actively involved they're either after the blokes or they're lesbians.'

There is a gender order within 'the game' which the women's rugby league club has had to compromise with. That said, the players themselves through their commitment and behaviour both challenge the accepted expressions of male identity and subvert them. The team is coached by an ex-professional man, who "meks us work wi'out any exception... as far as 'e's concerned we're players, not women", a situation which the women are happy with. They are Australianised, and are professional in the sense of their attitude to the game and to preparing for games. As such, the team attracts players from a wide area who are interested in proving

themselves as rugby league players, and the male image of “fat women laiking about at touch and pass” is demonstrably not true. At their matches the women play with as much intensity and aggression as the men. Another player in the team explained that

‘In some ways we’re more aggressive than men, they have a big fight then laugh about it, but with us it’s niggles, niggles throughout the match... and you never forget a grievance.’

Injuries are dismissed as side effects of playing, and in the same way as some of the men the women in the team delight in recalling injuries and how they occurred. One player described how she was concussed in tackling a well known female rugby league player, and on a social night the topic of conversation was who had been hurt the most and where it happened. In this sense the women are taking the expressions of masculinity associated with ‘the game’ and using them for their own means. As one respondent said, “we don’t want to act like blokes, we’re women, and we’re rugby players... when we’re out drinking we’re women together, but it’s all a piss take really.”

The women, as members of ‘the game’, use some of its invented traditions and shared understandings to define their own symbolic boundaries, even though some of the actions and values are associated with expressions of masculinity. The same respondent, who had been brought up watching rugby league, explained that “mi dad and mi brothers were surprised at first, they dint think women could play rugby league... mi dad wondered why I wanted to act like a man, but I think he realises now that women can play rugby league, and be respected as players first and women second.”

This struggle to achieve respect is the driving force behind Mary Smith, a rugby league fan and ex-player, who is also a referee. As a figure of authority, the referee is a male icon in sport, and Mary has had to face abuse and disinterestedness at every step of her refereeing career. Even when she decided to apply to be a referee, the governing body replied to her as

“Mister Smith”:

‘I rang up the secretary and said I’d like to join and they said ‘but you’re a woman’.’

When the governing body accepted her after a special meeting she found herself at the centre of some media attention, which concentrated on a humourous, seaside holiday postcard angle, “talking about the length of my legs”. Other referees thought she just “wanted to sleep with all the men”. She also had initial hostility from her family and mother, who “wanted me to be a normal woman” and “one friend thought women shouldn’t be referees, and she stopped talking to me”.

Through perseverance and the support of the governing body’s Australian controller of referees, the only person who actively encourages her and other women referees, Mary has reached a senior amateur open age level. The abuse and hostility has not gone away. On the pitch the players generally respect her, as increased professionalism means the players have a fairly disciplined and focussed attitude once they are playing. At one match players frequently called her “sir”, not in a mocking way but because that is the accepted shorthand for the referee - a male shorthand. However, she has had problems with players abusing her and refusing to accept her decisions, particularly with reserve teams and Sunday league sides. At another match she had to dismiss six players who didn’t respect her authority, and at other times she feels she has had to ignore certain remarks to avoid enflaming the situation.

Off the pitch, in the changing rooms, the banter of the team is often aimed at her (Curry, 1991; Kane and Disch, 1993). On one occasion her changing room was between the two team changing rooms, and she could hear both sides discussing her. She said that “they didn’t know I was there... the abuse and the sexist remarks, the things they were going to do to me on the field, it was unbelievable... because I was a woman”. This sexual banter and dismissal of her ability, however, is rarely said to her face. Instead there is subtle innuendo before and after matches,

such as club officials putting their hands on her shoulder and other intrusive body language. Offers of drinks and over friendly smiles are also elements of male behaviour she has to face, “I know in their eyes what they’re thinking”. Back handed compliments such as “you did as good as any man” are given to her earnestly, as she believes people do not know what they are saying is wrong. But the fact she is always judged as a woman, not as a referee, is one that shows the gender order is being maintained under her challenge.

The strongest resistance to her is on the touchline, from spectators, who use the fact she is a woman to criticise her every time she makes a perceived mistake. At one match a man walked up and down grumbling about women referees for the entire eighty minutes. But, as she said herself, “it’s women who blatantly slag you off”. This could be seen at the same match. Two women stood to my side and commented how unnatural it was for a woman to referee, and questioned her motives for doing so.

Women who challenge the gender order within ‘the game’ face massive hurdles. If they try and subvert and contest expressions and definitions of male identity their own female identity is questioned. Although the women’s rugby league team and Mary are successful, and feel they have proven their worth as women in ‘the game’ to themselves, they have yet to succeed in convincing the men who dominate ‘the game’, and are seen as curiosities or, worse, “I was told by one famous coach when I met ‘im that I could almost be a man”.

Rugby league is still very much a man’s game. Crucially to the analysis, rugby league also helps to create a sense of male belonging.

Creating imagined men: belonging in ‘Sudthorpe’

One supporter explained “Sudthorpe [the club] don’t really represent the place, you don’t get the blokes who drink in the [Sudthorpe pubs] going of a Sunday... you can’t expect a

Sudthorpe man to watch a team that don't represent Sudthorpe, or even play there anymore". This was backed up by one of the helpers at the club, who followed all three teams within the club to every match religiously, who complained that "the directors all come from Wakefield". There is a suspicion that the coach does not care about the Sudthorpe tradition, and only three of the first team squad are "Sudthorpe lads". What counts is that both at the pro club and with the amateur sides, control is in the hands of men, and the perception is that "it's a game for the working man, invented by the working man" (Maurice Oldroyd, BARLA Chief Executive).

The maleness of the imaginary community has become conflated with an invented tradition of an ideal 'Sudthorpe man', whose precedent is situated in the imagined world typified by Bill Brown's imagery in Chapter Six of the man watching the match after finishing work, then going to the pub with other men. The symbol of the 'Sudthorpe man' has become a boundary in the localised imaginary community, whose guardians are those men who use the perceived past of the community to legitimise both their own maleness and their sense of social identity and belonging. Hence the black rugby union player was "one of us", a "Sudthorpe lad", because he was a "boozier and womanizer". He fitted the ideal image of manhood as defined by the imagined community's invented traditions and historical values.

The quintessential 'Sudthorpe man' is a coach at the junior club, Mark O'Reilley. He has played for the Chemicals and the professional club, and is central to the pub social networks that define 'the game' in the locality of Sudthorpe. When I was following connections in my research I invariably returned to Mark. I was told by a number of respondents that Mark was "the man to talk to if you want to know about Sudthorpe rugby [league]". His centrality is something he is aware of, but he puts it down to the fact that "I just get around, people get to know me when I'm out and about involved with the rugby [league]". Clearly Mark conforms to the ideal 'Sudthorpe man' that has been imagined, which some of the professional players do not fit: he is

locally born, he has played, he coaches, he likes a drink, he has a quick temper, and he is aware of the importance of rugby league in defining a sense of community. As he told me

'When I'm coaching lads, I want 'em to realise how important rugby [league] is, it's more than a game, it's a way of life.'

Expressions of masculinity are important in defining belonging and the symbolic boundaries of the imaginary community. The invented traditions that justify the sense of community are heavily biased towards a masculine history, where both 'the game' and historical Sudthorpe are seen as male domains. The effect of this on the creation of 'northern man', and the implications for 'the game's' exclusivity and its openness towards outsiders, is discussed in chapter eight.

The cultural production of masculinity and its affirmation in the media

The hardness of the game, the violence and the ability of players to cope with pain, has been established. Following Jansen and Sabo (1994) one can see a pattern of war metaphors throughout the popular literature and the coaching jargon: big hits, killing the attack, digging in, trench warfare, bombs etc. The media is a crucial site for the production and affirmation of the dominant masculinity (Dunn, 1986; Lee, 1992), and also helps define what expresses that dominant masculinity (Nankervis, 1994). In the imaginary community of rugby league, the connection between masculine construction and the emic media texts described in chapter six is particularly important, while rugby union's Five Nations tournament is perennially hyped with aggressive masculine styles bordering on racism - for example, the 1996 England v Wales match was marketed with the Welsh team seemingly singing the nursery rhyme "fee fi fo fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman, be he strong or.... I'll grind his bones to make my bread" from Jack and the Beanstalk on a television advertisement. Other examples of the explicit masculinising of

sport through advertisements can be found every day on television and in magazines: rugby league has had the Laurie Daley advert selling trainers and masculinity and has made the connection between itself and famous English war victories (Agincourt, Naseby, Waterloo) in adverts for the 1995 Premiership. Sport is described in explicitly masculine language in an attempt to normalise the gender order (Duncan and Hasbrook, 1988; Duret and Wolff, 1994). Lynch (1993) has demonstrated how advertisements for Australian rugby league reflect a cultural repositioning of the sport. Using the muscular body of the players, the advertisements have explicitly attempted to attract women to the game - the homoerotic content of the adverts is also, according to Lynch, a marketing strategy for a city (Sydney) with an active and influential gay male scene. However, the dominant images of rugby league remain hegemonic masculine (McKay and Rowe, 1987): the Laurie Daley advert appeared in 1995, two years after Lynch's paper.

The most important producer and normaliser of masculine discourse and symbols in rugby league is the match report. The two weekly papers provide a complete service every Monday, covering the professional clubs, the National Conference, and any other big matches. These match reports use both a masculine language, and create a masculine expression of the match's eighty minutes of play. Deviance from this masculine style and structure is rare. As a male match reporter with three years experience working for one of the trade papers I am aware of the restrictions on structure and style of a match report: editorial policy and tradition decide what is a 'good report'. Both weekly papers, while having different editorial stances in the imaginary community, provide similar match reports - the masculine production and affirmation transcends tensions within the imaginary community, though the expressions differ slightly: the *Rugby Leaguer* has a populist style, whereas the *League Express* is more expansive and critical. That said, the masculine language and structure in the *League Express* remains strong. For

instance, Chris Moore ('Wardy hails the big Rovers revival', League Express, 248: p. 13) starts with "David Ward hailed an heroic Featherstone defensive effort which maintained the great Rovers revival" before going on to suggest "a forward battle was very much on the cards. So it proved as both sets of six got to grips with each other straight from the off". The Rugby Leaguer is more explicit, and the masculine style is adhered to even when the reporter is female - it has become tacit. In a report on a World Cup match, headlined 'The Battle of Britain', Charlotte Parker begins "Two Bobby Goulding Exocet crossfield bombs killed off any hopes Wales had..." (Rugby Leaguer, 1947: p. 16-17). The war metaphors discussed by Jansen and Sabo (1994) are presented without a trace of irony.

My own reports follow the editorial style, and as such are part of the masculine production and reproduction in the media. It is to one of these ('Bram-busters!', Rugby Leaguer, 1909: p. 16. Reproduced in Appendix Three of this thesis) I turn to next, a match between Bramley and Swinton in the Second Division of the Rugby Football League.

The report is littered with masculine symbols, and uses an aggressive, confrontational language. Swinton are "a shadow of the side that beat Leigh": here I am using a cliché that actually criticises them for not winning and being weak. I congratulate Tony Barrow jr. for "hard work" ie he tackled roughly, doing his best to inflict injury, and showed no sign of relenting when charging at top speed into other players. He is held up as an example of how to keep going and play strong, an exemplar of a "rugby man". Ray Ashton is a "tactical genius", equating him with a general at war deciding a plan of action, and the Swinton hooker is "lively", a coded word that means, tacitly, he is tough and able to play beyond the rules. The home defence is "caught napping" - a message to kids learning to be rugby players and men, to maintain a high workrate all the time if they are to win (and become men).

Swinton are described as pounding the Bramley line, another explicit war metaphor

(Jansen and Sabo, 1994). But that line holds firm, and it is the Battle of Britain/Rorke's Drift all over again, strength and faith in one's masculinity overcoming adversity. But there is still a "stalemate" until the intervention of Ashton (the Napoleon figure of shrewd masculinity) and Hall, who is "back from suspension", a code for being strong and short tempered. He causes "havoc" (knocks people over so that it hurts oblivious to his own pain), turning the game in Bramley's favour, who "kill" Swinton in the end.

This report does not tally with my own recollection of the match. It was a miserable day at a decrepit stadium, and the match was, to be frank, quite dull and uneventful. However, in writing my report I knew the editorial demands of populism, excitement and aggressiveness. In reaching the reader, the match has taken on another reality, the printed text is more real than my hazy memories: the report defines the truth of the events, what actually happened becomes irrelevant and forgotten.

The structure of a rugby league match report in either of the two weeklies stresses the war element of 'the game', praising the confrontational aspect and rewarding players for their toughness and ability to score. The report congratulates victory above all and is designed to stress that victory over the losing team's failings. By calling masculine highlights (tries, hard work, overcoming adversity, fighting) key moments in the game a myth is created over what 'the game' is about. Hence substitutions are ignored unless it is through them that better men arrive on the scene to win the game through their strength and skill. The eighty minutes of the match are reduced to a stereotyped view, a 'gender advertisement' (Goffman, 1979), a masculine signifier that extols the war and conflict aspect inherent in 'the game' as the most important one. The style and structure of the report reflect Barthes' (1972) myth making, and produces information on the gender order that is reflected in 'the game'.

But the report is also caught in the tension between the different expressions of

masculinity that operate in Sudthorpe, Featherstone and other locations where the imaginary community of 'the game' is represented. Editorial control dictates how 'the game' is presented to the supporters of 'the game' who read the reports, and to some extent it decides on the symbolic boundaries. At the same time, the myth making inside the media is informed by tacit signs within the imaginary community. Hence the match report feeds into the masculine discourse and that of the meaning of 'the game', but it is also informed by these discourses. The two way process of enculturation and enculturating defines what is written: how the dominant masculinity becomes expressed, and the archetypes and metaphors that are used (Lynch, 1993; Jansen and Sabo, 1994).

'The game' is seen as spectacle and sport by opposing discourses (Moorhouse, 1989), but it can also be both through a reading of metaphors and myths in the match reports. It is a sport for men, for boys who want to be men, and it is a spectacle of dominant masculinity (Critcher, 1987; Hilliard, 1994). Expressions of masculinity identified in American sport (Messner, 1992) come to the fore: game as war, survival of the fittest, dedication, physicality. Older expressions of masculinity celebrated by traditionalist texts such as Clayton and Steele (1993) are glossed over but referred to through codes such as "lively" in my report, that draw upon the mutual knowledge (Giddens, 1984), the knowledge of the insider: of white, working class, 'northern' man.

The language of masculinity

The style of match reports and the language they use is part of the wider aggressive language. The secretary of the professional club spent an entire game next to me in the press box encouraging each player with the ball to "go on, son, straight at 'em, make 'em scared to tackle yer!". This language is reflected in jeers based around softness or questions of a player's

masculinity when he produces an error. One Sudthorpe chant is full of violence expressed towards the city rivals, and it is evident from the words it is a man's song:

sung to the tune of Que Sera, Sera -

When I was just a little boy

I said to my mother, what should I be?

Should I be Sudthorpe? Should I be (the rivals)?

Here's what she said to me...

Wash your mouth out, son,

And go get your father's gun

And shoot the (Rivals) scum, shoot the (Rivals) scum

The song reflects the rituals of masculinity, of becoming a man through understanding the 'proper' actions and deeds that define manhood (Klein, 1990). It also highlights the masculine language that makes discourse about expressions of masculinity possible. In this chapter I have been concerned with expressions as actions/beliefs, but expressions can also be based on language. The language of masculinity is one that is prevalent throughout western discourse (Burke and Porter, 1987; Harris, 1995). Easthope (1986) discusses the role aggressive and confrontational language plays in expressing male identity, through exploring how and why men swear and joke.

In the imaginary community of 'the game' of rugby league swearing is commonplace, and the word 'fuck' is rarely used in the sense it was originally intended. Comments like "my ankle were fucked", "all that fucking about [at training]", "there's always some daft fucker on a team" and the reference to "quiet fuckers" in Chapter Six all show that swearing and swear words are an important part of the language of the imaginary community and its men. They define the gender order and act as signs that the discourse is talking about expressions of

masculinity - it is men's talk, and as such the men feel swearing is wrong in front of women and children (except those boys who are being enculturated, who must learn to swear).

The important discourses between men are those of playing, of the hardness of particular games and players, and of sexual exploits. While some discourse may be interpreted as self depreciative irony, such as one respondent's comment that "the only thing I've pulled recently was a muscle", it is still clearly part of a wider masculine language. Winning, war, pulling, drinking and fighting are all part of a symbolic language that can be drawn upon to defend and define the expressions of masculinity in general discourse.

Enculturation into the norms of 'the game'

It is at the junior level that the process of masculinising the players is undertaken, where the imaginary community's gender order is reinforced. Boys are taught to "have a laugh with one another, play hard and win". The enculturation of boys into the norms of 'the game' occurs at the same time as their schooling into how to become men. I have already shown how both 'the game' and cultural sites such as the media and language are crucial in this masculinising process. However, it is at the junior club that boys find their maleness defined and produced: it is here they realise what makes 'the game' tacitly a man's world.

Earlier on I discussed the junior section of the union club. At the Boys' Club the boys are taught by men such as Mark O'Reilley, learning both the tactical aspects of the game and the cultural aspects of 'the game'. The coaches at the Boys' Club are quick to shout and use abusive language to get their way. Boys who do not come upto scratch are often feminized by shouts of "you're a fucking useless girl!". The language and the repeated commands of "get stuck in!" and "try harder!" create an environment where boys must learn to accept the hegemonic masculinity or leave. One youngster, a thirteen year old said

'I know of two lads who packed it in, they coul'n't 'andle pressure... I love it, me.'

An older teenager suggested that "in this game you can't take it personally, the coach knows best even if you know he's a cunt". The boys who take the abuse and the hard training of tackle drills, runs, sprints and circuit work feel they have already become men. The older boys take up weight training and devote more time to training, but the spin off is they become more aggressive and capable of giving back some of the abuse they received earlier, as in Chapter Five.

One of the members of the Boys' Club told me that

'As lads get older they want to impress girls, so they want to tek on t'coach, show 'im they're not afraid... it's all about controlling that aggression, saving it for the match.'

The imaginary community and enculturation is also sustained through being literally born into it. Family networks are crucial in teaching youngsters about 'the game': all my respondents on the rugby league side mentioned family or close friends of the family as being influential in bringing them to 'the game'. A familiar pattern emerged at Netherborough, though it was not so clearly defined: Jason, for example, was the son of a committee member and ex-player, and had played for the club since he was eight. In this family-friend support network men play a large role. They become father figures for boys, or indeed they are the biological fathers. What counts is that this authority figure, who acts as their Virgil in guiding them to the paradise of belonging, is male. As such, expressions of masculinity are seen as normal and necessary for this belonging. The coach is an obvious father figure, a male authority to which the boys look up and eventually rebel against once they feel they have become men (Easthope, 1986; Messner, 1992).

But there are tensions at this level of enculturation. Exposed to the Australian ideas permeating the game, the young lads now see maleness as being something else: the dedication and professionalism of the Lombardian ethic. This is seen at Chemicals, whose coach introduced more rigorous training and a weights room, and whose ambition is to take Chemicals out of the

County League (the Saturday league in which most of the Sudthorpe clubs play) and into the National Conference, where the players and coaching methods resemble those of the professional league. The boys at the junior club are exposed to Australian rugby league and the top division in this country, and see the game as a way of earning money. What counts for them are the training and conditioning methods of the top professionals. They want to follow two of the recent under-18 squad and join Wigan, or another big team. Amateur rugby league and even Sudthorpe are seen as fallback options. They want to be successful, and are aware of what it takes:

'I'm looking to turn pro, I reckon I've got a chance maybe with [top club]'s Academy, they're impressed with my attitude... it's all about looking after yourself, maybe giving up things,' explained one respondent, before going on to break with one of the crucial older expressions of masculinity: *'I know it's supposed to be part and parcel of it all, but I've never had a drink [of alcohol], and I never will, it's not worth it.'*

A perfect example of the way expressions of masculinity are changing in 'the game'.

Another issue is the introduction of young girls into the sport at age levels up to and including under-12. The Boys Club have resisted this and have no girls playing for them, but they have been forced by the local council to put in motion a name change to the Club for Boys and Girls. Graham complained that "we only do rugby and boxing, girls don't want to do that", but they have accepted the reality of the decision (no girls, no funding). At one match where a girl was playing the youngsters were encouraged to "have some fucking pride in yer jerseys! If they hit you hit them back!". Apart from the appeal to loyalty to the social network the lads from the Boys Club were congratulated for their violence, and when an opposing player was kicked by one of the home side, a supporter shouted "stop beefing! He hardly touched yer!". It is in this climate of aggression that the young lads were being turned into men (Messner, 1992). The solitary girl on the pitch (on the opposing side) was not involved in the violence, and when she

beat her marker to almost score a try, this marker was shouted at by a Boys Club fan, who screamed “what’s wrong? Can’t you tackle a girl?”. This young lad’s masculinity was doubted, though I saw him later in another match “getting stuck in”, though I do not know whether the humiliation of letting a girl beat him was still on his mind.

Discussion

It comes as no surprise to learn that both codes of rugby are seen as men’s games. At the top level they are dominated by men, and women are the exception rather than the rule. In rugby league, Kathy Hetherington has become President of the RFL, but real power remains with the Chief Executive and the Chairman (sic): she remains the only woman at the top level of ‘the game’, a position she achieved through her role as Council Representative for Sheffield Eagles, a club controlled by her husband. These games serve to maintain and defend the gender order (Connell, 1987), though that order is under strain from both women’s desire to have influence and access to the games, and a tension between masculinities in the games.

The evidence presented shows an emphasis on the violent aspects of the game. It has been taken as self-evident that this culture causes the bracketing out of women through sexual jokes, boasts of conquest and the disbelief in the athletic qualities of women. Homophobia is also a ‘natural’ part of this social construction: poor performances on the pitch, as well as inability or undesirability to drink large amounts of alcohol, are ascribed to unmasculine traits. Words that denigrate different masculinities such as “sissy”, “soft bastard”, “puff”, “queer” are used against those who do not reach the standards of playing, fighting and drinking. The word “woman” is also used as a term of denigration, as in “get off the floor, you fucking woman”, a shout heard at a match. To be a man, the players have to take injuries with a stoic acceptance. Jimmy’s story of carrying on playing, true or not, is an expression of this hardness, a desire to prove one’s

manhood, to show the listener how hard one *is*. Shaun Edwards of Wigan played most of the 1990 Cup final with a fractured cheekbone and depressed eyesocket, without painkillers (the injury occurred during the match). Alan Prescott - at a 1958 test match dubbed by RL historians as the Battle of Brisbane - stayed on the pitch with an obviously broken arm. These cases are known to be true, extreme examples of overcoming the pain barrier and fighting on to win, thus reaffirming their masculinity.

Masculinity and expressions of masculinity are also central to the creation of an imagined, male community, that of 'Sudthorpe', where maleness is perceived as a historical necessity for belonging to 'Sudthorpe'. Hence 'Sudthorpe man' is created, and is defined by men within 'the game' who control who belongs, and who doesn't. In other words, there is a hegemonic conception of masculinity that is being expressed in a sport that is itself the subject of a struggle over hegemony: the struggle over the meaning of the symbolic boundaries, between the localised discourse of the traditionalists and the globalised discourse of the expansionists. This issue of who belongs, and how belonging is defined, will be expanded in the next chapter.

Afterword: the drug issue

Drugs in both sports have not been mentioned. One player at Chemicals said "the only drug round 'ere is [brand of bitter]'s". Nevertheless, the game of rugby league has a drug problem. Steroids and amphetamines were common in Australia in the eighties (Fenech and Fenech, 1993). A recent survey of Australian first grade players revealed 40% believed steroids and other performance enhancing drugs were in use (Rugby League Week, 25(20)). Jamie Bloem of Doncaster RL was banned recently for steroid use, and promptly claimed its use was rife in rugby league (Higgs, 1995). Although he later retracted the statement, the RFL recently upped its drug testing programme to include the off-season. Claims from the RFL and Australia

are that any drug taking is isolated and in line with what any sport would expect in terms of positive cases. The RFL has confused the issue, however, by banning players for cannabis use and allowing the stories to be conflated with the Jamie Bloem case (Hadfield, 1995a). Painkillers are legal in the game of rugby league and rugby union (e.g. see Hanson, 1991; Caplan and Schofield, 1993, for one player's refusal to have painkillers), and there is a fine line between legal performance enhancers and illegal performance enhancers. As the will to win becomes more and more the embodiment of what it means to be a successful man, the need to find any short cut to success will grow stronger. This has already been pointed out within 'the game' of rugby league in a fanzine (Waller, 1995): it is to be hypothesised that performance enhancers are in use in both games, and their use will increase as the Lombardian ethic takes over both sports, and the technology of performance enhancers stays one step ahead of adequate testing procedures.

Chapter Eight

‘Londerners ‘Il never tek to league’: belonging and exclusion

‘History, in order to happen, has to be observed by people who know they are observing History. Skilled people, in fact. It’s no good just anyone being there. It is well known that vast areas of the planet Earth had no history whatsoever until explorers turned up and brought History with them.’

Pratchett and Briggs (1994: p. 163)

This chapter is not about history. It is about the expressions of identity within both sports and their conceptions of ‘the game’, how they are grounded in discourses about history, not that history itself. In particular I will discuss how this historical discourse has combined with perceptions in the present to produce the cultural norms of the two imaginary communities. As I will show, when these cultural norms are taken out of the context of the imaginary community and placed in discourses on belonging and exclusion within the wider society, issues of unequal power relationships come to the fore. This chapter, then, analyses my research and the imaginary community through debates about invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983), fictive ethnicities (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988) and their relationship to the racialised Other (Gilman, 1985), and perceived relationships between the sports, their histories, hegemony and ‘class’ (Scase, 1992). From this I will return to the statement I made in Chapter One that rugby league is a working-class game, and ask whether this working truth is sustainable in the light of problems over definition, invented tradition and identity.

Imagine all the people?

Before I turn to the use of history within the imaginary communities in the production of symbolic boundaries and cultural icons, it is necessary at this stage to re-engage with the very concepts of invented traditions and the imagined community, as described by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and Anderson (1983). The invented tradition theory treats history as a narrative created in the present which looks backwards. In looking backwards, a story is told that justifies ideologies in the present, which does not necessarily relate to actual events and experiences of the past. One can see that Anderson's concept of the imagined community of the nation shares this idea of the use of the past in creating and justifying the present, though instead of ideology or personal identity, the imagined community defines a nation. As discussed in Chapter Two, Cohen's (1985) conceptualisation of the construction of a symbolic community - the imaginary community - uses the idea of invented traditions as one means of defining symbolic boundaries.

This idea of inventing or imagining the past has understandably come under criticism from a number of directions. Jarvie (1993) has argued that not all traditions are invented in the present. Rather, they are selected from a range of pre-existing experiences. While this criticism extends the theory, it is clear that this selection is still taking place in the present. Following the work of Wilson and Ashplant (1988a, 1988b), this selection process can be seen to be biased by the interests of the present ideology. And following Baudrillard (1988b) and Denzin (1988) it can be argued that the pre-existing experiences and the invented experiences become conflated and impossible to distinguish from one another, that "history [has become] instantaneous media memory without a past" (Baudrillard, 1988b: p. 22): so the real experiences, while they may have happened, are indistinguishable from the

invented tradition. In this chapter I shall be concerned with the historical discourses in the present, and how they are used to create boundaries and cultural icons.

A more trenchant critique of Hobsbawm has come from Anthony Smith, who argues that traditions and their role in defining nationhood cannot be described as inventions, and argues that fabrication and manipulation are not the primary means through which the construction of tradition takes place. As he suggests, “traditions, myths, history and symbols must all grow out of the existing, living memories and beliefs of [people]... their popular resonance will be greater the more continuous with the living past they are shown to be” (Smith, 1993: p. 16). This dismissal of the imagining and its role in defining community is also expressed in criticisms of Anderson. In particular, there is concern that nations and nationalisms are more than just a psychological invention (e.g. Billig, 1995).

In response, I would argue that although the discourse uses terms such as ‘invention’, ‘imagined’ and ‘imaginary’, this does not imply that the external is dismissed in place of a community or historical story that someone just made up in their head while sitting in front of a fire. What Hobsbawm, Anderson and Cohen are saying is that discourse, symbols, perceived realities, shared understandings, and hegemonic ideologies are far more persuasive in both defining history and identity - what actually happened, who we actually are, become meaningless questions, because we cannot answer them without recourse to these imaginings. Secondly, by speaking of imagination, we are not saying these ideas and perceptions are wrong, or false. Rather, for the people doing the imagining, it is the reality they use to shape their everyday life (Cohen, 1985). This does not imply the Academy knows best and is dismissive of the public - it implies the very shape of identity and history is realised through constructing meaning and understanding.

These concepts are generally applied to a notion of nationhood, of national identity.

As is clear from the previous chapters, however, I am not describing a nation. I am not making any claim to nationhood for Yorkshire and Lancashire, nor am I even suggesting that the imaginary community of 'the game', coupled with these other concepts, defines a pseudo-nation distinct from England. However, what these concepts help to delineate is what Balibar and Wallerstein (1988) call a 'fictive ethnicity', a group of people who perceive distinct boundaries and traditions that distinguish them from the Other. Hence the statement made by one respondent that supporters of rugby league "are an oppressed minority, we're like them Indian religions, we're marked". The fictive ethnicity describes how the members of the imaginary community perceive their own culture, and their cultural position compared to the hegemonic conception of the nation (see also Andrews and Howell, 1993, for beliefs of 'Welshness' centred on rugby union). As I will now show, this fictive ethnicity expressed through the imaginary community is a source of both belonging and exclusion.

Historical discourse and its uses

For the rugby league respondents, there was a clear historical event that had become a myth (Barthes, 1972), a cultural icon: the formation of the Northern Union in 1895. The history of rugby league is littered with tales and events that support the present's definition of the 'the game', and the fictive ethnicity associated with it. Even at Chemicals, there are pictures on the wall pertaining to events in its history that are seen as giving the club identity: cup victories, matches against professionals, and the opening of the clubhouse by a Sudthorpe born player who is now an International. In Chapter Five I briefly discussed how the idea of the professional and the amateur are used in historical debate. In Chapters Six

and Seven, I showed that historical imaginings and present centred interpretations of events in the past maintain and reproduce ideas of community and masculinity. For instance, in explaining rugby league's role in his life, one fan explained that

'It's like... everything about it, it's always been about honesty, about being our game, pride in yer roots'. When I asked him to explain what he meant by it being their game, he continued. 'A northern game, for northern folk, that's what it's always been... you see we went our own way because we wanted to rule our own destiny... and the people who play it, they've always reflected their roots... you don't get any egos, well you didn't until they started, all this contract business, I'm talking about back then, before Lindsay came along, players lived in the same street as the fans, drank in the same pubs, so they were like... it were an accepted part of the game, that it was ours, and that we, that is the hard working class I suppose, your average man, could somehow have his values expressed through rugby [league].'

There is a potent image of an honest, hard working, working class, white man that is found in historical discourse surrounding 'the game', and this image is used to justify positions in the present. For the speaker, the idea of rugby league, controlled by the working man for the working man, helped define his identity, and the identity of those others in 'the game' he associated with. The formation of the Northern Union is crucial to this, and supports the assertion made by Jarvie (1993) cited earlier, as the formation is an actual event. However, it is how this is used, how the story is told, that is important, as it is through this discourse that we can see the invention of traditions that define the imaginary community and the role of the white, working-class northern man as a fictive ethnicity within 'the game' and in the larger society.

Within 'the game', the formation of the Northern Union - as the Rugby Football League was known until the Australian term "rugby league" (Lester, 1988) was adopted in 1922 (Gate, 1989; Moorhouse, 1995) - is known universally as the Split (from the Rugby Football Union). This term is commonplace both in the writing of emic historical texts (Delaney, 1984), in the trade papers and fanzines (Roper, 1992), and in the normal discourse of people within 'the game'. For instance, one fan of the professional club spoke of "everything now is down to the Split". Another, in referring to possible changes to the game through the intervention of media moguls, said that

'There's no way people'd let someone control us, or change the game, merge it with union, it wouldn't happen... cos the game's all about defiance, toffs who want let working lads get brokentime for missing work, y'see that's what the Split was really, defiance of the establishment, sticking it up them down south, them who think they own everything... Split was about us, rebelling, not doffing our caps... working class pride.'

The Split, as can be seen, is used to support the invention of a culture defined by what it is not: no southerners, no toffs. The Other becomes a stereotype which is identified and excluded (Fiske, 1993). It is also, according to the respondent, about working lads: about men. And by identifying a continuous line from the working class of the Split to the working class of 'the game', one hundred years of migration patterns are glossed over. Hence, the glorification of the men involved in the Split as role models for the men of 'the game' (the women are only allowed to access the imagery through the male identifications, and even then they are given a subservient role as wife or mother) denies access into 'the game' for the large Asian and black populations that live in areas of the north where rugby league is established.

By the very reference to “The Split” one can see its importance. This event is the critical moment in the history of rugby league as it has been written in hindsight: it is the Bethlehem of rugby league, to go with the singing of Blake’s Jerusalem at test matches and cup finals. It conjures up images of working-class resistance, of working-class culture, that are debated and contested by both the members of ‘the game’ and historians coming from other imaginary communities such as ‘The Academy’. From the 29th of August, 1895, rugby league counts its years, as is testified by the Centenary League and the attendant party to celebrate the fact (Howes, 1995). It is the moment that is generally agreed upon as the time of rugby league’s birth, when twenty two clubs decided to form their own league structure, administrated separately from the Rugby Football Union.

It is understandable, then, that the debate over the importance of the Split, and what the Split was about, is part of the tension within the imaginary community of rugby league, and also defines the relationship between rugby league and rugby union. It is a clear example of history written for the present, to justify and support the ideology of the present (Jenkins, 1991; Wilson and Ashplant, 1988b). In this case, the conflicting ideologies are those of the expansionists and the traditionalists, who wish to see ‘the game’ changed or defended. The Split is also used as a definer for the culture surrounding ‘the game’, a definer for the fictive ethnicity wrapped up in discourse about masculinity, class and (white) northern-ness. Finally, the Split is a tradition used to imagine the sense of community (Anderson, 1983), through invention of traditions surrounding the Split, and in its importance as the split from the Other: from rugby union.

Popular interpretations of the Split draw upon the imagery of the northern worker demanding his right to be paid. Another respondent made the connection between the Split and trade unionism when they claimed that the Split was an example of “workers taking

over the factory". The idea that the Split was a clear example of working-class rebellion is maintained by popular emic literature such as the **When Push Comes To Shove** series of books by Yorkshire Arts Circus (Clayton and Steele, 1993; Clayton, Delaney and Gate, 1995), and the trade papers. The class imagery is used by the administrators themselves. Both Maurice Oldroyd of BARLA and a top RFL official described rugby league's origin myth as being about "the working man" demanding his rights, throwing away the shackles of the rugby union mandarins of the middle-class south. It is this image that appeals most to the defenders of the status quo, who see in this invented tradition a powerful representation of their own class identity, and who fear that in changing 'the game' this relation with a perceived working-class heritage will be lost. But the image of the working-class rebel also appeals to expansionists, who see their own aims as being a continuation of this mythical hero: the working-class man (see Chapter Nine). It is how the tradition is used that defines the interpretation of 'what it's all about'. Note that this image does not stand alone - it is inextricably connected to ideas of region, of masculinity, of power, and of exclusion. This sporting hero (Nankervis, 1994), described as white, northern, working-class male, is used to justify implicitly the symbolic boundaries of the imaginary community that let in those who resemble the hero, but excludes those who do not.

According to the official rugby league history, the Split is essentially about broken-time, where the players demanded recompense for lost earnings, and the clubs supported their wishes (Delaney, 1984; Gate, 1989; Moorhouse, 1995). But Davies (1988) and Latham and Mather (1993) have suggested the impetus behind the breakaway was the self interest of the bourgeois officials of the large clubs, who wished to create exclusive and lucrative leagues to guarantee fixtures. As Davies elaborates, the northern clubs operated like a cartel. This argument is also implicit in the analysis of the Split given by Dunning and

Sheard (1979). They argue that the Split and the issues of broken time and organised league structures were part of a 'civilizing process' controlled by the middle-class entrepreneurs who were in positions of power in northern rugby. Professionalisation, they argue, was inevitable, and the Split was a result of the new northern middle class trying out their power. Dave Russell (1988) and Graham Williams (1994) agree with the inevitability of professionalism argument, but claim that the impetus was the competition from football. In the north of England, the big rugby clubs had no choice but to try and compete for spectators and players with the association code, which was growing in support amongst the working-class fan base of northern rugby.

Phil Melling, an ardent critic of the Rugby Football League's administration and one of the main expansionists behind Welsh rugby league, uses the interpretation of the Split given by Dunning and Sheard (1979) to paint his own picture of the problems facing 'the game'. He suggests that the self important petty bourgeois men who were behind the Split have been in control of rugby league for a hundred years, and it is their self aggrandisement, exclusivity, snobbishness and parochiality that has caused rugby league to remain stagnated and bankrupt in the northern heartland (Melling, 1994).

Tony Collins (1993, 1995, 1996) suggests that the driving force behind the Split was the demand for quality entertainment and success from the spectators, coupled with the desire to be recompensed from the working-class players. Broken-time and professionalism were only used as rhetoric between northern and southern administrators, as, he argues, remuneration was common both in the north and among the supposedly amateur gentlemen of the south. The issue, then, was one of class - a gentleman amateur could be paid for indulging in his sporting activity, but a working class man could not make a living playing a sport. The rhetoric of amateurism was class rhetoric. But given the pressure of the working-

class spectator and player, the northern clubs were forced into brinkmanship with the Rugby Football Union, in an attempt to placate the demands of their constituents. The 'radical' northern clubs, according to Collins, were in fact controlled by conservative capitalists who did not really want to break away. The Split, then, becomes an accident, which the Northern Union officials tried to redress for the next ten years. As late as 1907, Bradford suggested a return to the Rugby Football Union, a move which was not thrown out straight away by the "working class rebels", but which was put to the vote and turned down (G. Williams, 1994).

If the Split and the image of the working-class rebel go towards the creation of invented traditions and symbolic boundaries within the imaginary community, the equivalent hero and cultural icon in rugby union is the gentleman amateur (cf. Macrory, 1991). As Collins (1995) has shown, the gentleman amateur was paid even before the Split, and the term 'shamateurism' is well known. As I have discussed in Chapter Five, the amateur rugby union player does not stand up to close inspection. Even rugby union historians acknowledge that boot money, jobs for playing and payment in kind were commonplace throughout the world of rugby union throughout its history, especially in areas such as Wales, South Africa and New Zealand, where the game was played by the working class (Andrews and Howell, 1993; Jones, 1994; Grundlingh *et al.*, 1995; Nauright and Chandler, 1996).

Yet the image remained a cultural icon, and even as I write, after a year of open professionalism, the Rugby Football Union is in the grip of a struggle between the top clubs - who wish to become fully fledged professionals (and control sponsorship revenues) - and the county committees and small clubs, who turned out in force to elect their man - Cliff Brittle - to office on the Executive Committee with a remit to defend the old idea of amateurism (Simpson, Jeavon-Fellows, Lord and Best, 1996). During my research, the

amateur gentleman appeared both in the flesh, and in conversation. I conducted one interview with a senior county and RFU official, who insisted on meeting me in a committee room and calling me "Mister Spracklen", and who maintained a formal distance between us. At first he was suspicious of me, but when I told him I had been to Cambridge it seemed to lower a barrier. Even so, he kept his blazer buttoned throughout the interview, and his impeccable dress and manner reminded me of the stereotypical British Army officers that used to appear in old films about the Empire (as it turned out, he was ex-Army). Ironically, his views were quite realistic, and he was not - to quote Will Carling - an "old fart". He accepted rugby union would have to go professional, and he expressed admiration for rugby league. However, he continued with the caveat

'When it does happen, I think it will be a sad day for people like myself. It will be the end of the unique spirit we have in rugby [union]... there will be no room for decent, hard working people like myself who put in their own time... every club will have full time accountants, PR men, bureaucrats... everything will be run to order, and things that don't fit will have to go... but I suppose that's progress.'

The amateur gentleman is, or was, central to the whole concept of the rugby union game. As Stephen Jones puts it, "there is a central heroism in the whole concept, of course. It is only a guess, but by God, it is a good guess, that rugby's balance... stems from amateurism" (Jones, 1994: p. 27). He is a cultural icon which the people at Netherborough use to define their history, to define their boundaries. Even when there is criticism of these boundaries, that criticism is bound up with the image of the amateur gentleman. For example, while one respondent said that rugby union was "essentially for those who want to take part and not be too concerned about winning at all costs", and others spoke of rugby being for middle class men, or a "more refined sort" (see also Chapter Five), others at

Netherborough dismissed the imagery. One respondent was quite keen to prove to me that the club differed from other union clubs because it was egalitarian, and that its members and players were from all classes. As he put it,

'We're not a snobby club, we're not an exclusive club for sons of company directors and solicitors, we're a proper club with big ambitions, and if you're good enough to play you're playing.'

While this was in some sense true, and the club actively recruited players regardless of where they came from, and paid them in kind (see Chapter Five), the amateur gentleman prevailed as a symbolic boundary. One respondent, who had played professional rugby league when he was younger, and who was a builder by trade, stressed the importance of the club as a place where men could be imbued with a spirit of comradeship and fair play. Winning matches, while good for the club, was not the sole aim of the team - it was there, according to this respondent, to provide an opportunity to play for fun. Another respondent stressed the importance of this spirit (the spirit of the amateur gentleman), as it gave members of the club a sense of camaraderie, a belief in the importance of good manners, and stopped the players and members taking what was "just a game, eighty minutes of enjoying oneself", too seriously.

Given the prevalence of 'shamateurism', the evidence in Chapter Five, and the fact that Netherborough struggled to reconcile the idea of the amateur gentleman with their own situation, it is surprising that some of its senior members still saw the boundary as unassailable. One respondent, a county committee member and someone referred to by one of the players as "a classic alikadoo", laughed at my suggestion rugby union was going to turn professional, and denied that payment to players had ever existed. He corrected my assertion that union was going professional and told me that "rugby [union] is an amateur

game, it will always be an amateur game, it is for amateurs... the boys who play rugby [union] would not play rugby [union] if it were otherwise.”

For some at least, the amateur gentleman is the only definer of the symbolic boundary, though for others the meaning of the ‘amateur gentleman’ is being questioned. However, its status as an invented tradition, as a cultural icon which is referred to in defining identity and defining who does not belong, remains in place, even after professionalism (see Chapter Nine).

Northern man discovered

In rugby league, these interpretations of history, the symbolic boundaries they define, the construction of community and male identity, and the relationship between them, create a ‘fictive ethnicity’ (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988), a belief by people within the imaginary community that their feeling of belonging is commensurable with that of social groups more easily delineated through shared experiences, origins, beliefs and culture. The term fictive does not imply some deceit on the part of these people. Rather, it implies that the idea of their exclusiveness is created by these symbolically constructed boundaries and invented traditions. Nor does the use of the term imply there are easily defined ‘real’ ethnicities that can be pigeon-holed, marginalised and stereotyped - as I will show, the related concept of ‘race’ is itself fraught with terminological problems, and will be elaborated in a sensitive manner when I discuss how the idea of the northern man is in part defined by the Other (Opotow, 1990), and excludes that Other.

The concept also gives the people within the imaginary community a sense of belonging as an insider, an explanation for the boundaries of the community, and a description that is normalised by their interpretation of the history of ‘the game’. When I

travelled to see the Kangaroos in the Second Test at Old Trafford we were part of a convoy of coaches on the M62 all displaying local loyalties through scarves and names - Hull, Castleford, Leeds, Batley, Oldham etc. At the ground there was a carnival of regional pride and identity, displayed by grumbles about the food and sterile stadium, sponsorship by John Smiths Bitter and Regal cigarettes, and Yorkshire-Lancashire rivalry typified by chants of "Yorkshire sheep shaggers" and "Lancy-Lancy-Lancy-Lancy-Wankyshire". In the crowd, this feeling was summed up by a banner that declared "Great Britain: the pride of the North (sic)". As 'Sudthorpeness' proved to be important in Chapter Six, rugby league is also associated with a larger place, which gives 'the game' another imagined facet (Anderson, 1983): the north of England. An analysis of the distribution of rugby league clubs (in this country - obviously this section does not apply to rugby league in other countries), both professional and amateur, shows that an overwhelming majority fall into the 'M62 Belt', with another large density of clubs along the West Coast of Cumbria. So while rugby league has a regional bias towards the north of England, it is erroneous to say the north of England is rugby league's heartland. Rural areas, the north-east, Liverpool, Manchester, Stockport and (possibly) Sheffield are all areas where rugby league has not established itself.

Nevertheless, there is a strong sense of 'northern-ness' among the players, supporters and administrators of rugby league. This perceived natural relationship between rugby league and the north of England is identified by traditionalists who see in the 'northern game' an expression of their distinctive fictive ethnicity and its attendant culture (Moorhouse, 1989; Clayton and Steele, 1993). For example, one respondent at the amateur rugby league club told me that rugby league "is a northern game... [it's] been - the rules, the way all this - [has been shaped] by northerners". Others spoke of the relationship between this mythical 'northern-ness' and 'the game' through the way in which 'northern-ness',

northern identity, was expressed in and through 'the game', in a way similar to the relationship between cricket and expressions of Yorkshire identity and character identified by Russell (1996) discussed in Chapter Two. Another respondent explained about how 'the game' gave him - as an outsider - a template for the 'northern' form of life (Wittgenstein, 1968), how it "showed me a way of living, admitted me into a world where I belonged... rugby league has this love affair with its people, its geography, you can't separate it from where it is, it is so involved".

The implication is that 'the game' is inextricably linked to a sense of northern identity that is justified with recourse to the past, and which is expressed through the values seemingly inherent in 'the game' such as working-class honesty, "pride", distinctiveness, manliness, toughness and physicality, equality of opportunity - "a chance for any man to play according to his ability", and tension with southerners and the middle class. This sense of northern identity is seen as a source of strength for the traditionalists, who see the relationship as natural and unassailable, and an articulation of their own sense of personal and social identity. Expansionists do not deny this 'northern-ness' an important role in defining and being defined by 'the game'. However, they feel it is the source of rugby league's failure to capture the imagination of populations outside the traditional heartland - as such, expansionist writers such as Phil Melling (1994) and David Hadfield (1994) both recognise this relationship between 'the game' and 'northern-ness', and criticise and deconstruct the seeming natural, normalised status of the relationship. As one expansionist, the coach of the amateur club, put it,

'Being aware of roots is one thing, wallowing in them is another.'

Or as one committed supporter and member of the Rugby League Supporters' Association explained,

'Rugby league's hamstrung, and it always will be while there's this idea that it's just a northern game... there's nothing about rugby league that makes it so, why else would - do kids in Papua New Guinea or Carcassonne play it because it's a northern game? I admit historically it started out, you know, the Northern Union, but they [the traditionalists] are confusing what has happened, and what could happen, in the future... while they're proud of all this - like when at Featherstone, they say all you had to do was shout down the mine shaft if you wanted a pack for a match, all this stuff about clubs being at the heart of these little working-class communities, everyone turning out and walking down to the ground - it's changed, it's almost the 21st Century, and they're still in the 19th, you know... as I was saying, while they claim rugby league is a provincial game it'll be treated like one.'

The expansionists fear that this 'northern-ness' merely marginalises rugby league, and hence deprives it of any chance of surviving in a world of business, big sponsorship and intense competition between sports for the corporate pound or dollar or yen (Alt, 1983; Cantelon and Murray, 1993). There is evidence that localised sports that express strong feelings of local identity are under threat from the processes of globalisation both nationally and internationally (Maguire, 1994). And it is clear that the relationship between rugby league and the north articulated by the population of the imaginary community is used when describing the sport in the media (e.g. Beattie, 1995: see Kelner, 1996: pp 11-27), and when rugby union writers and fans discuss the game. Stephen Jones calls rugby league "a sport apart... I have never met a southerner with a blind bit of interest in the sport" (1994: p. 166), and says "league is so much part of the culture of its heartlands" (1994: p. 172). However, in writing this he is denigrating and dismissing league as an irrelevance compared to his favoured code, not celebrating with the traditionalists the strength of this sense of

northern identity. As the chairman (sic) of the union club said, "league may be strong up here, but we're stronger everywhere else".

The sense of 'northern-ness' is not unique to league, either. Netherborough union club's members saw their 'northern-ness' confirmed when they played teams from the south, where according to one player "all the clubs are rich", or as I showed in Chapter Seven, the southerners are all "sailors". Before they travelled to one away fixture I was told that the match was "more than a match, it's about us - [the county], the north - against them". There was also a strong argument common among the discourse in the bar that the Rugby Football Union was biased towards the south and the Home Counties in particular, and that the Northern Division was not given enough say or support. This led to a mood of defiant separatism and an identification with the north in a north-south divide.

Implicit throughout the construction of a northern identity is an understanding that the identity constructed is masculine: it is the northern man identified in the discourse of respondents both in this chapter and previous chapters. Given the way in which the imaginary communities of rugby league and rugby union produce, maintain, affirm and express masculine identity - particularly the hegemonic masculinity of Western society - it is not too surprising to find his equivalent northerner present in the discourse surrounding 'northern-ness', particularly in rugby league and the invented traditions of 'the game'. It is this northern man that is the template for the fictive ethnicity of the population of the imaginary community, the cultural icon that defines belonging, that is supported by the invented traditions, and which shapes shared meanings, mutual knowledge (Giddens, 1984), and symbolic boundaries. Hence southerners are excluded from the definitions of proper belonging in 'the game' and women struggle to be accepted on equal terms as men if they take on roles other than the passive supporter or the wife/girlfriend. The tension within the

imaginary community between differing expressions of masculinity and traditionalists and expansionists can also be analysed as a struggle over the definition of this cultural icon, and the traditions and symbolic boundaries associated with it.

There is, of course, another facet to this construction of belonging and exclusion, one which has not yet been brought to the analysis. Northern man is implicitly white, and what this entails has to be addressed.

Who belongs? Northern man against the Other

The imaginary community of rugby league as defined by the Other has been discussed: it is not southern, not homosexual, not feminine, not middle class, not for those who do not understand the language and myths of 'the game'. Northern man is a product of historical imagining. He is not a representation of the geographical, contemporary north of England. He has nothing to do with the Geordie or the Scouser. Northern man is, in the definitions of 'the game', "a picture of someone who is short rather than tall, muffled at the throat with a scarf that's probably white... or, alternatively... someone propping up a bar with a pint at his elbow or in his fist. That, according to the mythology, is typical Northern working man; therefore Rugby League" (Moorhouse, 1989: p. 45). The image that is conjured up, and the invented traditions that go to define him and his importance in rugby league, are rooted firmly in the past, and in particular in the discourse of rebellion and taking control of destiny surrounding the Split.

Northern man harkens back to a golden age, when entire forward packs could be found down a Featherstone pit, when over a hundred thousand turned up at Odsal to watch a cup replay, when Great Britain ruled supreme on the test field, when the working class were seemingly more numerous and shared a similar culture and consciousness, when

Hunslet won all four cups thanks to the 'terrible Six' and the kicking of Ahr Albert, the eldest of five Goldthorpe brothers. In this mythologising, in this remembering and writing of history, there is a present-centred nostalgia that is used in any ideological discourse defining belonging and between insiders, which also excludes the Other. In defining belonging as synonymous with northern man and his attendant historical myths, a boundary is created between those who can associate with him, and those who cannot. Northern man belongs to a stage in recent history that is before the post-war movement of Asian and black people to this country. As such, northern man and 'the game' of rugby league take on an implicitly white identity, and Asian and black people in the north of England are not seen as part of the normalised imaginary community.

Although there is not space to engage in the theoretical debate around the use of 'race' as a category, it is worthwhile here to digress so that my own position is clear. While agreeing with Miles (1993) that 'race' is itself a racist category developed from theories of biological race and social Darwinism that have been discredited by most theorists and researchers, I follow the position spelled out by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1993) that because of the use of 'race' as a discriminatory tool, it is necessary to apply the term ourselves in an attempt to show its complexity and the contradictions inherent in racist dialogue. In other words, 'race' is an important sociological concept (Gilroy, 1987; Mason, 1994) that cannot - yet - be discarded, though the idea that there is a 'black' race genetically homogeneous and distinct from the 'white' race is dismissed. While agreeing with Fleming (1994) that the use of Asian as a term to indicate a cultural group within this country erroneously groups different religious and ethnic groups together, for the sake of this thesis the term Asian is used, as it was the simplified analytical category used in the work on racism in rugby league by Long *et al.* (1995). Similarly, 'black' is adopted without

recognition of the diversity of people under that label. Following Modood (1994), both Asian and black are used as the terms used by the population themselves, with Asian preceding black, as Modood suggests (1994), to indicate the size of the respective populations.

Research into the nature and extent of racism in rugby league (Long *et al.*, 1995) has shown that there is a small but significant problem within 'the game'. This research ran in parallel with my own research, and I found it useful to treat my role as a researcher for this report as part of my greater role as a researcher for this thesis. The report found that Asian and black participation in rugby league at an administrative and spectator level was almost zero - out of over thirty-one thousand fans, we counted only twenty-four Asian and black spectators, using the broadest definition of black (Long *et al.*, 1995). My own research corroborates this - none of the fans I spoke to were black, except for one who I classified as an ex-player, and another who was involved in the amateur game. In terms of numbers on the playing field, there was an almost complete absence of Asian players, though black players were not under-represented (Long *et al.*, 1995).

Given the size of the Asian and black populations in the towns along the M62 Belt, and the control of education and the media by the dominant white population (Solomos and Beck, 1994), and the supposed egalitarian nature of rugby league, one would have expected to see Asians and blacks at all levels of 'the game'. However this is not the case, as could be surmised from my earlier arguments. Long *et al.* (1995) explore a number of reasons for this, and although racist abuse is a factor, more telling are the stereotypes and assumptions made by white people within 'the game', and the image of 'the game' described earlier. As one white player explained, in trying to work out why Asians were not involved more in rugby league,

'A lot might think it's a northerner's kind of sport, pits and all that, all white men, aggressive, hard... they just don't want abuse.' (cited in Long *et al.*, 1995: p. 36)

Asians were seen as culturally bound, preferring cricket or avoiding mud and contact because of "religion". As one chairman of a professional club put it, "Asians cannot wear turbans in the scrum" (cited in Long *et al.*, 1995: p. 27). Another reason for their absence was offered by biological explanations, suggesting Asians were not built for rugby league. Finally, it was suggested that Asians just were not interested in rugby league. While this may be true, given the all-white image of 'the game', there are enough Asians who do want to play rugby league, according to Ikram Butt (Hadfield, 1995b) and two of the players interviewed in Long *et al.* (1995: pp 40-41).

Black players entering 'the game' find it hard to overcome stereotypes. Unlike their white counterparts, black players do not have the same familial and social access to 'the game', they start out as outsiders already objectified as the Other (Opotow, 1990). They have to prove themselves, while at the same time receiving abuse because of the colour of their skin (Holland, 1994), and being stereotyped according to racist beliefs about biological attributes (Cashmore, 1990; Long, Carrington and Spracklen, 1996) which leads to some positions being available to them such as the wing and second row, and others being denied: what Phillips (1976) and Maguire (1991) call 'stacking'. It is clear that 'the game' - being culturally associated with these invented traditions that imply a certain white, northern, working-class male hero - is unattractive to some Asian and black sports fans and athletes. And at the same time, those who do wish to be involved in 'the game' find racism and prejudice built into the boundaries of the imaginary community in the form of shared history and meanings which they do not share, and stereotypes and assumptions (Gilman, 1985; Fiske, 1993).

The idea that black players do not grow up in 'the game' is given credence from my own research. At the amateur club a black player who joined for a season only did so, according to one respondent at the club, because he was spotted by another player in a nightclub. His size, the white player felt, made him suitable for rugby league, and the black player was encouraged to join at a time when the club was short of big players. Another black player, Neville Livingstone, has continued in the amateur game after a career as a professional which included a spell at Sudthorpe both as a player and a coach. Neville was born in the West Indies, but moved to England as a youngster. At school in the north he was the only black boy in a class of white boys, who all supported the local team - to fit in, he began to play for the school team, though his parents disapproved of him playing what they felt was "a rough game for beer bellied white men". Neville, Like Cec Thompson (1995), used rugby league as a means to improve himself as a man and gain acceptance into predominantly white social circles. However, even though he worked hard and became a moderately successful professional, he found all the problems described by Long *et al.* (1995):

'It [racism]... it's still in t'game, but not now as prevalent... as a professional you have to ignore it, don't let it get to you... some players do it... but you can't give away a penalty. [You] just have to smile, to diffuse the situation.'

Although he did not explicitly say why, his brief tenure as a coach at the professional club was fraught with problems of discipline and differing opinions between himself and some of the players and directors, and it may be that racism was a factor. However, this speculation must be compared to the professional club's record of black involvement, which has produced a number of quality juniors, and which has had for the last twenty years a

higher than average proportion of black players in its ranks, of whom at least two to my knowledge served as captains - one of whom was Neville himself.

At amateur level, Neville suggested that racism, especially overt abuse, was worse than in the professional game, and this tallies with some of the comments in Long *et al.* (1995). As a player-coach of a team he set up in an area where a large number of Asian and black people dwell, Neville is proud of the fact his team is not an all white pub team (when I interviewed him he had four black players and one Asian player in his squad - later another Asian player joined, who according to Neville was good enough to play professionally). However, the league they play in is a regional league, with many teams operating out of small villages with few non-white families, and as such they suffer regular abuse from the players and spectators. This also occurred frequently at the Chemicals when they had a black player on their team, though Chemicals fans themselves made racist comments when the team played a club like Neville's from the inner city.

Another black respondent, a player at the professional club, felt that rugby league was potentially a sport that welcomed everyone, and he suggested that the other black players in the team were part of "the rugby league family". However, he was not enjoying his time at the professional club as he was on the fringes of the first team and felt he was being deliberately ignored. He did not blame the club or coach for being racist, but he still felt that "you feel it, you start to think - is it cos of my colour? Is it cos I'm a black man?... you can't win, when you're playing good everyone loves you, but you get dropped and you just disappear, so people think 'he's just after the money'... I mean, money's important, that's why I play, that's why anyone plays, really, but you wonder maybe white players aren't seen as mercenaries."

For the black men in the white man's game, there is an extra burden to deal with - they are constantly judged with their colour in mind (Holland, 1995). The belief that this particular respondent was only in the game for the money is something that is often said about the outsiders, the Other, who make the grade, whether they be southerners, foreigners, blacks or union converts. In conversation in a pub I was told that certain black players like Ellery Hanley and Martin Offiah "couldn't give a shit about rugby league, they're not bothered about tradition, they just want our cash". The use of the possessive "our" is significant - even though both players mentioned have boosted rugby league's national profile, and have helped teams like Widnes, Wigan and Leeds to success (as well as the national side), they were still seen as 'not ours', and as such dismissed as uncaring mercenaries (when in fact both players have expressed pride in rugby league as 'their' game).

It seems that playing for money, as a living, is seen as morally inferior to playing rugby league for the love of 'the game', an attitude that paradoxically resonates with the sound of outraged defenders of rugby's amateurism such as the Rev. Frank Marshall of the 1890s (Dunning and Sheard, 1979; Delaney, 1984). Yet there is a clear case of double standards - white players, those who come from 'the game', are seen as role models when they sign big contracts, unlike the black players. This corroborates the picture developed in this section of 'the game' as inherently biased towards white men. But it also suggests that players are working-class heroes. As one successful white player said, "I'm always aware that I'm a figurehead for my class, a boy done good".

Class warfare and the rugby divide: is rugby league a working class game?

Throughout this thesis I have laboured under the tacit assumption that rugby league is essentially a working-class game - played by the working class, and hence through the looking glass of the imaginary community, shaped by the values of the working class. In other words, rugby league has become a token, a cultural icon that gives the bearer the right to be denoted as working class. Clearly, the invented traditions of 'the game' seem to corroborate the statement that rugby league is a working class game. Before the Split, the northern rugby clubs, unlike their southern counterparts, resembled soccer clubs in that the players and supporters were drawn from traditional working-class professions such as mining, shipbuilding, engineering and millworking (Delaney, 1984; Kenneally, 1985). When these clubs formed the Northern Union this profile remained valid, with very few exceptions (Green and Hoole, 1988; Adams, 1995). There is undoubtedly a history of working-class involvement in rugby league, expressed through the historiography of the sport and through the fans and players using ideas of the 'real' working-class communities such as Sudthorpe to define their imaginary communities in the present. The idea that rugby league is a working-class game is so strong it may seem a heresy to even question it. Even so, there are fans who do have what could be described as middle-class occupations, and who define themselves as middle class, such as my director of studies..

In the course of my research I realised that this assumption, an assumption that had led me to the research, was itself problematic. Is rugby league a working class game? In answering it, I knew the concept of class itself would have to be questioned (see Chapter Two). The changes over the last century from a modernist structure of capital to the contemporary postmodern structure-less consumerist society (cf. Rose, 1991; Bauman,

1992; Brown, 1994; Lyon, 1994), create difficult problems for the concepts of class. It is argued by Lyotard (1984) and Hollinger (1994) that the class stratification used by sociologists in the past is both outdated and irrelevant to the issues of power and discrimination in the postmodern society. Similarly, new right ideologues have declared the class system to be extinct - the working class has disappeared, or is so fractured it cannot be distinguished as a class (Baker, 1993: pp xvi-xvii). In response, theorists such as Miliband (1989) and Runciman (1990) have redrawn the class structure to take into account changing employment, social and political trends, while keeping the basic idea of class stratification. Others, such as Critcher (1979) and Evans (1993), draw attention to the way in which society is still divided between a ruling class and the ruled, who according to Gramsci (1971) are kept servile by the hegemony of that ruling class.

Although I was aware of the complicated arguments over what class meant, and whether there was such a thing as a working class(es), it was clear that in the field these theoretical arguments were invalid. In the pubs, in the stands, and on the terraces, people still talked about and lived a working-class culture (Clarke, Critcher and Johnson, 1979). Rugby league, seen by those who played, administrated and watched, is a working class game. They themselves live that working class form of life, and see in it a normal way of living life: rugby league, a few beers, a good laugh with friends. The masculine becomes working class, the working class becomes an expression of 'northern-ness', and that 'northern-ness' becomes the essence of rugby league's imaginary community. David Hinchcliffe, a Labour MP and chair of the Parliamentary Rugby League Group, suggests that

'I have always felt... some political affinity with a game that emerged from the day to day struggles of working people in the industrial North and has suffered numerous

attacks from the sporting establishment throughout its near one hundred year existence.'

(Hinchcliffe, 1993: 9)

In **When Push Comes To Shove** (Clayton and Steele, 1993) anonymous soundbites are littered with working class imagery and language, juxtaposed with pictures of Hilton Road, Leigh, with a pithead in the background (Clayton and Steele, 1993: p. 16) or men playing dominoes drinking beer under the eye of past Great Britain sides in a social club (Clayton and Steele, 1993: p. 34). The message is clear: "rugby league is the finest game a working class lad can ever play" (Clayton and Steele, 1993: p. 17). As one fan explained to me, "rugby [league]'s t'last place on earth where working class can be heard". Or as another put it, "of course rugby league's fucking working class, it's not exactly played by the fucking aristocracy, is it?".

Defining the class bias of rugby league is often done by differentiating it from the Other, specifically rugby union, which was seen by every single rugby league respondent as a game for a different class - identified as "poshies", "rich people", "people with good jobs", "university educated", "snobs", "the elite", "the Establishment", "people who think they're better [than us]", "middle class wankers", "sell outs" and "puffs". From a rugby league perspective, then, rugby union is seen as game for the middle class and/or the ruling class, who dominate society both politically and culturally. Resonating with working-class conceptions of masculinity, rugby union is also identified as a game for "puffs" - soft people of differing masculinity who are equated with the Other: the middle class. By this definition, then, rugby league is described by what it is not (Elias and Scotson, 1994). It is not soft, rich, southern middle class ("soft southern shandy drinkers"), therefore it is hard, deprived, northern working class.

The people at the Netherborough rugby union club concurred with this image of rugby league as a working class game, and saw that as rugby league's weakness. They associated it with the trappings of the traditional working class stereotyped by flat caps, pits, Hovis bread, outside lavvies and back to back terracing. One committee member at the union club suggested that rugby league was played by "working-class reactionaries clinging on to the past", and that rugby league itself would "disappear with the pits". This image of rugby league as being part of a decaying working class heritage (in this country) is also evident in media presentations of the sport, especially those that are defined by rugby union sources within these establishments. Typical of this is the condescending attitude of broadsheets which send their union correspondents to all the major rugby league events to write 'colour' pieces that mock flat vowels and flat caps, praise the northern working class's big day out, then suggest the action was almost comparable - in places - to 'proper' rugby (e.g. see O'Hare, 1995).

As for union, the people at Netherborough are divided over whether it has any class bias at all. From my ethnography I noticed there was some exclusivity about the club, with its membership, its committee, and the make up of its fans and members. In the car park the cars were expensive looking: new models or four-by-fours. On the notice board the rules for full membership of the club stipulated one had to have a proposer - a way of guarding the borders. A superficial inspection would lead to the conclusion that rugby union is indeed a middle-class game, which some of the members would agree with. The myth of the amateur gentleman playing the sport for pleasure, as an unpaid way of passing his leisure hours, was typified by the talk of union's spirit and *raison d'être*. The employment details, on the whole, also backed up this analysis - the members I interviewed were well off people with their own businesses, or professionals such as solicitors and accountants with a

university education. However, the fact remains that people at the club spoke of their club as being egalitarian, that Jason the player called himself working class, and that another respondent defined Netherborough as being a club “traditionally more working class than [other clubs]”. One must also take note of the working-class rugby union followers in places like Coventry (Smith, 1994) and the south west and Wales (Smith and Williams, 1980). Like rugby league, the situation is complicated once the idea is problematised.

So is rugby league a working-class game? It is not *the* working-class game, of course, and no-one would claim that. But it seems that rugby league followers do claim they are working class, and that rugby league is a definer and an expression of their working class roots and culture. Employment details provided by my respondents were too sketchy to analyse thoroughly. Whilst the majority of the fans had occupations that could be easily defined as working class, others had clerical work or professions that sound more like middle class professions - in one case a Chief Executive. The administrators were all owners or ex-owners of small businesses, or professional administrators from other fields. As for the players, they too were predominantly from working-class occupational backgrounds, but one who was full time was on a wage considerably higher than most workers whatever their class. This problem of defining class through employment was visible in our research on the nature and extent of racism. We concluded that it was “less easy to draw clear conclusions about the social class composition of the crowd because a large number of respondents provided inadequate information to be allocated to one of the six socio-economic groups commonly used in survey work” (Long *et al.*, 1995: p. 13). What we found, however, was that two thirds of respondents were in groups C1 and C2: lower middle class and skilled working class. Middle class? According to rugby league fans, going to rugby league is enough to mark them out as working class, and as one of the survey team I found it difficult

to reconcile this statistic with my own experience, my own research, and my ethnographic interpretation of the crowds at the matches we surveyed.

Class as a means of creating identity, class as a means of exclusion

The seeming conflict between the perceived reality of the people within the imaginary community, my research notes, and the statistical evidence can be resolved by examining ideas about the construction of social identity that have appeared throughout this thesis, and by examining power and exclusion in a (post)modern society. First of all, the weakness of defining class through looking at and categorising occupation has been commented on by a number of theorists (Drudy, 1991; Scase, 1992; Scott, 1994). Changing employment patterns brought about by a shift to a post-Industrialist society (Bell, 1973; Lyon, 1986) have seen a rise in the number of traditionally white collar, lower middle class jobs in insurance, banking, and other clerical and service professions. However, it is clear that this new class of workers - classified as C1s - share a similar heritage and culture to the traditional working class (Davis, 1979). The miner's daughter is now an insurance clerk, the miner's son is now a bank cashier. So although it is true to say the occupations traditionally associated with the working class are in decline, and that the postmodern society has created a wealthy consumer class where hamburgers and Hollywood films ('movies') are devoured by all (Featherstone, 1991), there is still a class divide between the ruling class, a managerial bourgeois class, and a working class that is denied control in the workplace and which still does the work. Now, however, that work is more likely to be inputting data on policy claims rather than riveting steel. To summarise, there is still a class system, and still a working class consciousness (Davis, 1979), even though the definitions and boundaries of

what traditionally constituted those classes have changed. If everything seems to be a postmodern confusion, it is perhaps because the theorists themselves are confused.

What matters, then, is the perception within the imaginary community that they are working class, inheritors of a working-class history (through invented traditions and imagining community) and a working class culture, which is celebrated through their adherence to 'the game' and all that implies. So the Chief Executive becomes working class through his love of rugby league, through the way in which he defines himself and his working class roots through being part of 'the game'. He is working class at heart, with a working-class background, and rugby league becomes a way of maintaining his identity. The club directors are the same, and so, I realised, was I. Rugby league was and is a way of defining who I am - at first it seemed perfectly natural to have this relationship with 'the game', but when I moved away to university it became a way of expressing vocally who I was. In resolving my own identity, rugby league tells me my roots, my heart, my soul, are working class and northern. So the question of whether rugby league really is a working class game can be answered in the positive, because 'the game' defines itself that way. To be working class, according to the population of imaginary community, is to be one of Us. Their entire world view is shaped that way, and as I discussed in earlier chapters, it is what people believe to be true that is more important (more 'real') than what is actually, externally 'true', in defining a social identity.

A summary of these findings, their relation to the wider society, and their use in analysing issues within that wider society such as the professionalisation of union and the Super League, are the subject of my conclusion, which is the next and final chapter.

Discussion

Chapter Nine

The final score: theory applied and conclusions

'It's as North as hotpot and Yorkshire pudding. It's as tough as teak. It's rugby league - a man's game if ever there was one. Someone once said of rugby union, 'A game for ruffians played by gentlemen'... Gentlemen have played rugby league. Gentlemen still do. But the hard core of rugby league players, with their cauliflower ears, their broken noses, their busted and bruised bones, would rather be called, to use a three-letter word, MEN... It's a down-to-earth game played by down-to-earth people. Good people. Solid people. To use that three-letter word again, MEN.'

Eddie Waring (1969, flyleaf: emphasis in original)

For many years Eddie Waring was the voice of rugby league, an icon of the nation, whose particular West Riding pronunciation of the phrase “and it's an up'n'under” when describing a high attacking kick (now called in more masculine terms “the bomb”) was mimicked by comedians everywhere. Eddie, the BBC's rugby league commentator, became a well known and much loved figure, with appearances on the Morecambe and Wise Show and a job hosting It's A Knockout. However, his fame seemed to eclipse the game of rugby league which he supposedly commentated on, and in the eyes of many rugby league fans Eddie was a northern caricature straight out of the Music Hall who did the image of rugby league no favours (Kelner, 1996: ch. 1). His image of ‘the game’ was inextricably linked with notions of masculinity, of community, of class, and of ‘northern-ness’.

I can only conclude that this image, this conception of 'the game', that Eddie Waring conjures up, is precisely the image I have described throughout this thesis. It is the invented tradition, the myth, the symbolic boundary, that has produced and maintained the imaginary community, the fictive ethnicity. It is an imagined myth, a masculine myth, a present centred conception of history that is part of the mutual knowledge of 'the game' - and it is this conception of 'the game', and its validity, that the traditionalists and expansionists are fighting over.

I am a rugby league fan. I am a sports fan. I am white. I am a man. In many respects this thesis has developed my sense of Self, and has made me aware of the contradictions and problems surrounding my own personal and social identity. This has not been the focus of the research, nor an aim. Nor am I about to give up the social norms that have shaped me and go 'find myself' in a wilderness, or in Featherstone. Nevertheless, in developing these theoretical ideas into a coherent framework about the relationship between rugby league, its history, its sense of community, and social identity (and similarly union), I have had to face difficult questions about my role in this. In any kind of research there is a certain amount of reflexivity, even in the 'hard' sciences (Latour, 1987; Collins and Pinch, 1994). I feel that whilst I have been involved in developing and refining this research process, I have also changed my own worldview, in particular my original belief in the egalitarian nature of rugby league. Rugby league can be a cruel game. It is a vehicle of exclusion, and maintains a hegemonic conception of masculinity that I no longer feel comfortable with. At the same time, it is still the game I have been brought up with, it is a game I was involved in so much I wrote a thesis about it. Reconciling these conflicting perceptions of my individual identity and its relationship with 'the game' is perhaps impossible - however, my outlook, my own definition of Self, and my relationship with others, have all been influenced by the research.

I am undeniably a different person from the one who started the research, and the change is a direct result of naturalist research and its inherent reflexivity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Ely, 1991). The research has been painful, yet in opening my eyes to things I had felt were 'natural', it has been a worthwhile process.

Loose ends: developing the research process

Like any researcher, I was disappointed that possible avenues of investigation suggested themselves too late in the process to be explored. Within the constraints of the PhD framework there is a limit to what can be achieved - it would be unrealistic to be expected to cover everything that comes to mind. Hence, although I was aware of the problem from an early stage, I did not try to explore the opinions and sense of community among the people of Sudthorpe who were not in the social networks around rugby league. In Chapter Six, I suggest that their conception of 'Sudthorpeness' would be different to that of the rugby league networks. My concern was for the imagined community created through the social networks of rugby league and rugby union - hence there was no necessary reason to expand the fieldwork to include the population of Sudthorpe and Netherborough who do not like or even know much about rugby. However, work needs to be done to compare the rugby imaginary communities, and the day to day life of the people who actually live in the localities (Day and Murdoch, 1993). On a similar vein, I have totally ignored the national sport of football. What is the relationship between the rugby networks (both league and union) and the large football clubs and large football following in the area? Dave Russell (1988) and Graham Williams (1994) have charted the historical development of the different football codes, but there is an absence of comparisons at the local level between the soccer code and rugby (league and union). In my original conception of this thesis, I intended to

look at what other sports the respondents liked, and where I asked that question there seemed to be no overlying trend. Some were big football fans, others disliked it immensely. Others were cricket fans. It did not seem to be a useful part of the field to analyse. However, research on football and its sense of community and its role in creating social identity (e.g. Taylor, 1992; Giulianotti, 1995) seems to indicate similar processes to my theoretical framework. In the case of rugby league in particular, which shares with soccer a claim as a white, male, working-class game, there seems to be a future avenue of comparative research. Looking at the way in which, for example, Bradford City and Bradford Bulls relate to the city and the people in the city and to each other, could prove worthwhile.

Although this chapter will discuss the Super League and the professionalisation of rugby union, it is clear that both topics deserve separate research projects in themselves. I will analyse their impact in light of my own theoretical framework, but the wider issues surrounding globalization (Maguire, 1994) and its impact on the codes of rugby need to be explored. Also, the economic and cultural implications for both codes of rugby can be covered to compare rugby on the global stage, to the microstudy I have developed. A historical analysis discussing the changes that have happened in both sports, similar in aim as Dunning and Sheard (1979), may also be worthwhile in the light of the recent upheavals in both sports. In a sense, my study has already become a historical document - future developments in both codes will make it even more so. Yet at the same time, it is possible that the imaginary communities can adapt and survive, a probable outcome considering the constant (re)invention of tradition (Jenkins, 1991).

There were other things I did not do that I would have liked to have covered. The participation of women as fans and players is something I touched on, but which deserves

more exploration. Rugby union has been far more open in developing women's rugby (e.g. Jupp, 1996): this is something I did not cover, but which needs to be examined so that comparisons and questions of expressing gendered identity can be raised. One might also ask why it is that women's rugby union is far more developed than rugby league. Is it an issue of class? Is it an issue of the northern male icon at the heart of rugby league? It is interesting to note that women's rugby league is at an advanced stage of development in New Zealand, where it was reported that a woman was transferred from one multi-team club to another for a fee and a male player (Coffey, 1996). It may be surmised that different conceptions of masculinity operate in New Zealand rugby league, which is predominantly Polynesian. This leads neatly onto another avenue of further research: cross-cultural comparisons. If 'the game' exists as a symbolic community that transcends borders, it must also be identifiable in places such as Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Yet at the same time, as I have shown in Chapter Eight, localised discourses are important in defining the meaning of the symbolic boundaries of 'the game'; so one must ask what do Papuans give in terms of invented traditions and imagined community to 'the game', and what do they take in terms of fictive ethnicity and mutual knowledge.

Given more time, one could expand the research to explore a number of permutations. I did not have time to go deeper into psychological explanations of identity and motivation, save for a brief review of the concept of masculinity (Easthope, 1986; Horrocks, 1994) and an examination in Chapter Two of motivation in reversal theory (Apter, 1982; Kerr, 1994). There is an opportunity to combine my theoretical framework with psychological theories. Finally, there are other sports that are similar to rugby in their masculine appeal such as ice hockey (Gruneau and Whitson, 1993) and American Football (Hoch, 1972), and sports like Gaelic football (Mullan, 1995) and the Highland Games (Jarvie, 1992) that are similar to

rugby league in being regionalised and a source of regional (or national) identity. All these could be examined in the light of my theoretical framework, and provide possible topics of further investigation.

Summarising the fieldwork

In exploring the field, as is discussed in more detail in Chapters Three and Four, I used a number of methods to gather data. However, the main thrust of my fieldwork was qualitative, and built around an ethnographic approach. I initially aimed to do a standard ethnography, what Spradley (1979) describes as a basic anthropological approach getting inside and understanding a particular group. As the research took shape, I adapted my method and used both ethnographic methods of data collection through long hours of fieldwork participant-observation, and semi-structured interviews. Some of this interviewing took place in a formal setting, the rest took place during the time allocated for the ethnography. In the course of the fieldwork, I also held informal conversations with people in the field in an attempt to get a 'feel' of the field, and the main issues that concerned people in the field. I took notes in a logbook, which included my own experiences, my own thoughts, observations, notes on interviews, and snatches of conversation. As a reporter in 'the game' I used this status to gain access and trust, and drew on some of my experiences as a reporter for the purpose of this thesis.

As will be seen from Chapters Five to Eight, I corroborated and triangulated my initial hypotheses and ideas through using the ethnographic fieldwork to support semi-structured interviews, and vice versa. In addition, I expanded my data collection to include conversations, opinions of people familiar with the field, newspapers and other media sources, and the limited number of secondary sources available. As I was working in the

naturalist paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) to develop theory grounded in the field (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), the relationship between theory and field was complex: the theoretical framework informed, and was informed by, my fieldwork, and the eventual finished version is only finished in so far as the fieldwork has ended.

The theoretical framework

The fieldwork, combined with the on-going literature review and theoretical analysis, has synthesised a particular theoretical framework, which itself has been applied to an analysis of the field. Throughout this thesis there have been a number of themes that have dominated the narrative. Whilst these themes have developed either from grounded theory or other sources (papers, books etc.), the originality of the thesis is the synthesis of these themes into an analytical lens through which the research can now be viewed. In Chapter One I introduced these themes, and in Chapter Two I conceptualised them as theories. It is worthwhile now, in the light of the analysis presented in the previous chapters, to review the theoretical framework as it stands, and attempt to connect up the dominant themes. Whilst Hughes (1990) argues that synthesis is an unattainable goal for the social sciences given the work of the philosophy and sociology of science on incommensurability and localised truth (Latour, 1987, 1990; Collins and Pinch, 1994), I argue that in synthesising I am attempting to create a new 'language game', a new way of discussing the production of knowledge (Wittgenstein, 1968). As a researcher in the naturalist paradigm, I do not and would not make a claim to external validity (Kvale, 1995). Instead, I suggest that this thesis is the result of my approach to the field (Ely, 1991), an explanation for the narrative of the thesis, theory that is grounded in the research process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As I elaborate my theoretical framework, it will be seen that these external philosophical concerns inform

the purpose and construction of the internal theoretical framework. That is, I have followed the maxim of medieval non-Scholastic natural philosophy, “as above, so below” (Debus, 1978): the concerns about the creation of meaning in the thesis are reflected in the theoretical framework, which concerns itself with the creation of meaning in the field.

Three ideas are central to the theoretical framework: a) that of the imaginary community, a sense of community created around the games of rugby league and union, a community bordered by symbols drawn from these games, and has different levels of belonging (Cohen, 1985); b) that of masculinity, and how masculinity is expressed through sports which are themselves produced by and producers of male identity (Messner and Sabo, 1990); and c) that of the invented tradition, a historical narrative that is used by people in the present to justify ideology and a sense of belonging that is invented for that purpose (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

In the preceeding chapters, I have shown that there exists an an imaginary community based around rugby league, which I defined as ‘the game’: that is, it is the game of rugby league, its attendant history, and its lived culture, that has created the imaginary community (this argument applies to union as well). In other words, rugby league *is* the imaginary community. Hence, when people in the field talked about the good of the game, or what the game meant to them and their social networks, they were usually referring to the concept of the game - ‘the game’ - not the actual mechanics of the activity. ‘the game’ was an extension of the figuration of the social network, in that it was justified and made real for the people inside it through a number of processes. The imaginary community described, as Bourdieu would suggest, a particular “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1977): a particular set of cultural symbols, a tacit understanding of what those symbols meant, a shared historiography, a feeling of belonging, an identification with ‘the game’, and a ‘mutual knowledge’ dictated

by language (Wittgenstein, 1968; Giddens, 1984). The symbolic boundaries of 'the game' were given meaning by a series of historical processes. 'the game' was given a history, a set of traditions that were invented by the demands of ideology in the present (Skinner, 1969; Wilson and Ashplant, 1988a, 1988b). While the traditions are based on actual events such as the Split, and have been chosen and emphasised from real events (Jarvie, 1993), it is the meaning and interpretation of those events that has undergone a process of invention for the use of the present (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). In a sense, 'the game' itself has been imagined, using Anderson's (1983) terminology: it has been given a sense of community and a parallel sense of history through interpreting the past as a place where the present was defined, and creating a sense of continuity.

A number of ideas of community appear to connect. From a localised study of Sudthorpe I have shown that an imagined community, a sense of 'Sudthorpeness', is maintained by the imaginary community of 'the game', as what 'Sudthorpeness' implies - white, male, northern working class - is the cultural icon that has, through a process of imagining, come to be implied by 'the game'. Therefore, the people who were part of 'the game' in Sudthorpe also chose to identify with a 'Sudthorpe' which they claimed to be situated in a real, working-class community that had existed with the rugby league club at its focal point. This was clearly an example of an imagined community that defined belonging through membership of 'the game' - in describing 'Sudthorpe' this way, these people excluded other interpretations of what 'Sudthorpe' means, particularly those meanings which the present population of the locality of Sudthorpe ascribe to it.

The process of historical invention and the interpretation of the history of 'the game' create cultural icons within 'the game', which act as symbolic boundaries. Hence, those who know the meaning of "play-the-ball", "Rorke's Drift" or "jam-eating", are at different levels

of belonging in 'the game'. It is convenient to think of an onion-skin model of the imaginary community, where each level is bordered by symbols with different meanings. However, there is also a parallel axis to the sense of belonging, where different meanings are defined and orthodox interpretations of meaning are contested. Within 'the game' described in my fieldwork there are two contesting groups battling to make their definitions of what 'the game' means the orthodox definitions. For the purpose of argument I have called these traditionalists and the expansionists, and what is at stake in the contest between them is hegemonic control of the meaning of 'the game'. Whilst both groups see the Split as important, and both see in it a defining expression of rugby league - rebellion - their respective positions give differing meaning to what that rebellion implies. It is clear from my research that 'the game', at its most basic level, is still imagined as being part of a northern, working class, white culture, at least in this country. As I elaborate in Chapter Eight, the cultural icon of the northern man is implicit in the culture of rugby league and in the structure of the imaginary community - it is the epistemic Form (Plato, c.400BCE:1955) which people use to define their identity and world view. In defining the symbolic boundaries and thus belonging in the light of the northern man, 'the game' serves to exclude those who do not fit the mould: southerners, Asian and black people, the middle class and women. The amateur gentleman works in a similar manner in rugby union.

The excluded have tried to reinterpret 'the game', though they have had minimal impact on the hegemonic version. Black people have played the game, and Neville Livingstone described himself as having rugby league "in the blood". Similarly, women have rebelled against the passive role defined for them, and as I showed in Chapter Seven women now play rugby league, and officiate at matches. However, while these examples are better than nothing, these challenges to the cultural icon at the heart of 'the game' remain

marginalised, and subject to obstacles and abuse at every step. Where the cultural icon has come under a more sustainable attack is with white male dominated enterprises such as the Student League, Hemel Hempstead's amateur club, the London League and the Broncos professional club, which reassess the cultural icon by normalising the role of southerners and (with the Student League) the middle class (Farrar and Lush, 1995).

The most salient point about the imaginary communities of league and union is their undeniable maleness. Sport is perceived in general as male directed and male dominated (see Chapter Two for a discussion). In synthesising my theoretical framework I have combined a social construction of masculinity with the imaginary community through using the latter's role as a place of defining personal and social identity, through contesting and understanding the meaning of symbols (Barthes, 1972). There is obviously a social pressure to define one's masculinity in a certain way which comes from the concept of masculinity developed by the hegemonic patriarchal ideology of the capitalist system (Hearn, 1987): a hegemonic expression of what it means to be a man. I have argued in earlier chapters how the expressions of this hegemonic masculinity can change, but the identity it entails is the same. By way of explanation I showed in Chapter Seven that 'the game' acted as a site for the expression and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, but that the expressions of that hegemonic masculinity were contested between different groups inside 'the game'. In particular, in union and league there was a conflict between expressions of masculinity such as bravado, fighting and heavy drinking, and expressions of masculinity associated with increasing professionalisation. In rugby league, I called this Australianisation. It is a crucial point that this contest over how masculinity is expressed, and what it means to be a man, is not one between conflicting masculinities (Connell, 1995). Rather, it is a contest over defining how a normalised definition of 'man' - white, hegemonic, heterosexual, competitive

- is to be expressed within the imaginary community. In other words, I have explored the rules of expression within the particular language game (Wittgenstein, 1968) concerning hegemonic masculinity and its relationship with sport within this country. One can see within 'the game' that the gender order is maintained, with those who attempt to alter it such as the referee - and those redefining masculinity within 'the game' such as Ian Roberts - facing marginalisation or abuse, or both.

It is clear that the relationship between 'the game' and social structures external to it have to be elaborated by way of conclusion. Before I deal with this relationship it is useful to use the theoretical framework I have developed to analyse issues within rugby league and rugby union that this thesis has so far only touched upon: the Super League, and the professionalisation of rugby union.

Using the theory: analysing what was left out

In April 1995, while I was still doing my fieldwork, the Rugby Football League unveiled a plan for a Super League, which was to be played in the summer and which was sponsored by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. The origins of the Super League, its relationship with events in Australia and a battle over Pay TV between two media moguls (Clayton *et al.*, 1995a; Moore, 1995; Kelner, 1996) is too complex to go into in this thesis. It need only be said that the Super League was the end result of the increasing commercialisation and orientation of rugby league, particularly in Australia (McKay and Rowe, 1987; Lester, 1988; Lynch, 1993; Moore, 1995), which led to a reinvention of traditions in that country. With the backing of powerful sponsors, and an intense advertising campaign (Lynch, 1993), rugby league came to be perceived as a sellable entertainment product. In 1995 the Australian Premiership, the Winfield Cup, expanded to include teams

from New Zealand and West Australia, and marketing strategies had made the televised product one of the most popular programmes throughout the South Pacific (Moore, 1995). When News Corp tried to buy the rights for this coverage from the Australian Rugby League, they came across a large obstacle in the form of Kerry Packer, who had the contract. When overt approaches failed, News Corp tried to set up their own competition, the Super League (Kelner, 1996).

The ramifications of the fight between the Murdoch-Super League and the Packer-ARL are still unclear, with appeals in the courts against decisions making Super League illegal going on as I write. What is pertinent to this thesis was the deal made between the RFL and Super League to set up a European Super League in this country (Clayton *et al.*, 1995a; Kelner, 1996) - in particular, the response from rugby league fans.

A campaign in favour of summer rugby league had been simmering away before the Super League, and the issue had been aired by a number of expansionist minded people such as Sheffield's Gary Hetherington, Open Rugby's Harry Edgar and a group associated with the RLSA led by two supporters who went on to become executives of the fans's association: Stuart Lake and Martin Bass. Traditionalists naturally objected to any idea of moving the goalposts, as they objected when the league structure was altered in the light of the Framing the Future recommendations (Lindsay, 1994). They did not like the traditions of 'the game' changing, as they felt their social identity - the fabric of their belonging - was bound up in the idea of winter rugby. Rugby was for winter - anything else was not rugby, and hence the symbolic boundaries of 'the game' were threatened, or rather, the control of meaning was under threat. If rugby league became a summer sport, that would mean their interpretations of 'the game' would be invalid, and marginalised. They feared the loss of control over meaning, and the dissolution of the imaginary community. As for the

expansionists, their interpretation of the invented traditions of 'the game' spoke of innovation and risk - they were all for change, as long as it was 'for the good of 'the game''. In the debate over summer rugby, expressions of hegemonic masculinity were at odds with the defence of tradition. If expansionists could describe a summer game in terms of skill and speed, emphasising masculine competitiveness and professionalism, the traditionalists had to resort to fears of injury, thus compromising their own ideas about taking pain. Hence the debate has been rather muted.

The issue of mergers, of big city clubs and the marginalisation of smaller 'community' clubs, was far more contentious. Here the traditionalists could draw upon imagery of the north and the issue of class conflict, with the memory of the industrial disputes of the mining areas being quickly associated with the defence of the status quo. As one protester wrote,

'To my way of thinking at the very least [the RFL and club chairmen] are guilty of a betrayal of no less seriousness than Judas Iscariot... Money was involved then, and money is the cancer now. After all the hardships this area has suffered - a long and costly Pit Strike, the loss of thousands of jobs, a bleak future for the young folk - we took all the Tory Government could throw at us and we came through it because we all had an identity. Now because of a jumped-up bookmaker [Maurice Lindsay] and a multi-billionaire who obviously has no interest in the future of the game... we are now threatened.' (Anonymous, in Clayton *et al.*, 1995a: pp 17-18)

Fans rejected the idea of merging clubs and discarding the smaller clubs in favour of new 'franchises' as they could see this would destroy the symbolic boundaries of the imaginary community, and the local identities/affiliations maintained by it. In this country 'the game' has been imagined as discussed in Chapter Eight: it acts as a treasure house for a

white, northern working-class culture that Williams would call a residual culture, compared to the dominant culture of British society (Williams, 1977). That is, the small clubs with their sense of local community, their strong traditions, were under threat by the Super League concept. If it had gone through under its original proposals, clubs like Featherstone, Swinton, Widnes, Hunslet and Huddersfield would have disappeared (Kelner, 1996). The idea of merging and creating new teams, and discarding the rest of the league, was an idea that struck deep into the imaginary community. By destroying the symbolic boundaries, loosening local ties and redefining what 'the game' means, the original Super League also attacked the fictive ethnicity built into the imaginary community through the invented traditions surrounding it. What was at stake, and what is encapsulated by the fans' response typified by the anonymous comments in Clayton *et al.* (1995a) was "a way of life" - the personal and social identity of the people within 'the game'. Its opponents felt Super League defined rugby league as global, not northern. They felt it defined league as a middle-class entertainment, not a working-class game (witness the seemingly natural connection between the Super League affair and the pit strike). By challenging the symbols and traditions that made up belonging and identity, Super League also tried to redefine expressions of masculinity in favour of overt Americanisation (e.g. Messner, 1992): game as war, as entertainment, as an athletic contest (Kelner, 1996). In opposing Super League, the traditionalists were parodied using stereotypes of northern culture and old expressions of masculinity - they were portrayed as backward looking flatcapped ex-miners or hardened square shaped "lads" (e.g. Beattie, 1995).

For the expansionists, the idea of the global 'game' was favoured above tradition, though there were reservations about discarding everything that defined rugby league as 'the game'. They saw in Super League an opportunity to take rugby league into a new era,

a chance to outdo rugby union, with teams in Paris, London, Dublin, Milan, Birmingham, Barcelona and Berlin (all are or were connected to Super League plans). For the supporters of Super League, including the Chief Executive of the RFL, the deal was an attempt to break with the traditions that defined 'the game' and in a sense invent new ones that did not limit 'the game' in this country to the M62 Belt (Kelner, 1996). However, as with the marketing shift in Australia (Lynch, 1993), the Super League was aimed at families with a high level of disposable income: namely, the white collared, white middle class.

The spontaneous response to Super League involved pitch invasions, a book condemning it, a fanzine campaign against it by the Rugby League Fans United (a new fans' association created by the traditionalists), questions in the House of Commons and near complete support of the fans by the national and local newspapers. Although other supporters, in particular the expansionist minded Rugby League Supporters' Association, gave a guarded welcome to the Super League (see *The Greatest Game!*, 23, in its entirety), the traditionalists felt they were defending the essence of 'the game'. They would not surrender their identity, they would not give away anything that defined them and their community. For the traditionalists, the imaginary community, the invented traditions, and the imagining, were real: they were everything in the way they shaped their lives and defined belonging (Cohen, 1985). The RFL and News Corp were forced into a compromise (Kelner, 1996). At the moment this compromise has protected the symbolic boundaries of the imaginary community, but their meaning is still being contested. The Split, for example, became a working-class icon for the traditionalists, whereas the RFL seemed to suggest Super League was the end product of the Split's daring innovation (Kelner, 1996). It is clear that a process of reinvention is under way, with the plans for the radical version of Super League ready to appear again soon - whether the traditionalists have been appeased,

or whether the pro-Super League lobby have successfully contested the meaning of the symbolic boundaries, remains to be seen.

Rugby union also underwent a process of transition in the course of this thesis, and again the final shape of 'the game' of union is still unclear. In accepting professionalism 'the game' in this country suffered more crises of identity than other countries. For example, in New Zealand and South Africa the idea of amateurism had been discarded many years ago (Laidlaw, 1974; Grundlingh *et al.*, 1995). It comes as no surprise to see these two countries and Australia leading the way in professional rugby union, both in payment to players and in professional attitudes to training and marketing - they have just improved on their already high degree of professionalism (Wyatt, 1995). In this country, however, the idea of professionalism was still seen as incommensurable with the spirit of 'the game' in many quarters. 'The game' had at its heart an idea of an amateur gentleman, who played for playing's sake and who maintained a set of standards related to invented traditions about the ideal Victorian man (Chandler, 1996). This cultural icon was not always attained by people within 'the game', and was seen by many as an object of ridicule from an imagined past (Green, 1960:1995). Even so, the amateur gentleman defined the discourse about what 'the game' meant, and those in control of 'the game' retained him as an icon even when violence was spreading on the pitch as differing expressions of masculinity took hold (Donnelly and Young, 1985; Jones, 1994). The decision to go professional legalised practices prevalent within 'the game' such as Jason's payment (Chapter Five), but also gave impetus to those who desired to see rugby union take a place on the global stage as an athletic, professionally run business. These people found themselves with the sudden opportunity to make their interpretations of 'the game' become the defining interpretations, and the RFU was thrown into confusion as money was thrown around, sponsorship increased, clubs threatened to

break away and rich businessmen like Sir John Hall bought entire clubs. The reaction from the amateurs was predictable. A coup at a meeting of the RFU by the counties and the small clubs saw their man Cliff Brittle elected onto the Executive in a bid to defend amateurism, and hence 'the game' as they knew it. Again, the issue is unresolved. At top level, rugby union was dominated by people eager to reinvent 'the game' (if they had not already done so), but at a local level the idea of the amateur gentleman is still adhered to. Whether the defence of this icon leads to a split between the professionalised top and the amateur bottom is speculation, but the fact that there is uncertainty and debate shows that the imaginary community is real enough when it comes to defining meaning in people's lives.

Using my theoretical framework, one can see that the issues in league and union can be analysed and understood. Super League and the professionalisation of union are not issues simply about money or commercialisation, the relationship between the games and the people involved in them has to be part of any explanation. In outlining my theoretical framework, I have been able to analyse the opposing positions in these debates, and suggest that what is at stake is the meaning of the two games.

Conclusion

It is with some reluctance that I bring the thesis to an end. As I have discussed, there are many ideas and possible avenues of research that I would have liked to have worked through. However, I am realistic enough not to expect to do everything, and I can only state my belief in the coherence and content of this thesis. The underlying theme throughout the research has been the development of meaning through grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and a synthesis of concepts and theories into a larger theoretical framework; this, coupled with the fieldwork, develops a picture of the relationships which were the

concern of the research rationale at the end of Chapter Two. Although I have discussed the problems in making any claim to generalised truths, and I would not begin to claim my research is directly applicable to other situations (even other rugby playing areas), I do believe the theoretical framework and the relationships it describes are transferable: that is, the thesis will be read and understood by others working in similar fields, and may help them understand their own field (Kirk and Miller, 1986; Hughes, 1990). As John Hughes concludes, “the upshot... is that there is no necessary reason why the solution of philosophical problems should be a precondition for social scientific work” (Hughes, 1990: p. 160). So it is with one eye on pragmatism and another on the desire to communicate my own ideas, that I make these concluding remarks.

As will have been made clear throughout the thesis, but particularly in the vignettes in Chapter Five and the discussion on the amateur-professional divide, the relationship between rugby league and rugby union cannot be distilled into a simple solution. Apart from a shared history until the Split of 1895, both sports have remained in close contact with each other, and have constantly used the other sport as an excluded Other to define what ‘their’ sport was not (Cohen, 1985; Opatow, 1990; Elias and Scotson, 1994). For instance, rugby union has defined itself as an amateur game excluding any form of professional rugby, not professionalism *per se*, and this has been taken to read as rugby league, to the extent of - in my own time as an amateur league player - a union club giving one of our rivals a complete kit merely because the jerseys had a chevron design, which they associated with league. In turn, rugby league has always looked to the other code as a deadly rival, and constantly made comparisons in an attempt to judge its own position in the sporting world. The relationship between the two in defining each other’s geographical, cultural and social

space is evident from the discourse around professionalism and the concept of 'northernness' and the sense of community established by both codes.

The amateur-professional divide, while acting as a definer of belonging and exclusion, does not stand up to prolonged examination. Both codes have a hierarchy of clubs and players, with an elite of professionals in terms of performance, pay and off-field activities, and both have their social clubs for social players. Neither rugby union's claim to be strictly amateur nor the simple division in rugby league between the 'professional' RFL and 'amateur' BARLA describes the perceived and explored reality evident in this thesis. 'Shamateurism', relative disorganisation, and professional attitudes distort the simple divide and render it meaningless. Richard Stebbins' concept of 'serious leisure' (Stebbins, 1982) seems to fill the gap between the social and the professional, by identifying leisure activities which demand time and effort and dedication from those who pursue them. Coupled with an increasing professionalism brought about by commercial and masculine discourses about success, it is no surprise that both league and union are seen as 'serious leisure' pursuits at levels below the elite such as Netherborough and the Chemicals.

Masculinity and its expression provide other similarities between the two codes. Both are seen as masculine sports defined by, played by and created for, men. They produce, maintain and reaffirm the hegemonic concept of what it means to be a man. Neither code challenges this masculinised view of sport, and other readings of identity within the codes are seemingly marginalised. Where they differ is in the expression of this hegemonic masculinity. Rugby union expressions tended to focus on social games and drinking songs based around sexual exploits (Green, 1960; Sheard and Dunning, 1973), whereas rugby league expressions of masculinity were derived from working-class conceptions of 'hardness', and inevitably led to the glorification of fighting and injuries. However, both

codes have seen a conflict between these older expressions of masculinity, which are associated with invented traditions and cultural icons inherent in the imaginary communities, and newer expressions of hegemonic masculinity which are ultimately derived from America and globalised discourses (Maguire, 1994) such as the pursuit of victory and the Lombardian ethic (Messner, 1992).

On the issue of class it is clear from my research that any attempt to make rigid definitions based on economic data gives rise to insurmountable problems (Scase, 1992). Class as a concept is best understood through the role of perceived consciousness (Davis, 1979) and language (Jones, 1983; Cornfield, 1991). That is, class becomes a cultural marker that is contested and continually (re)defined by both theorists and the people (Baudrillard, 1988b) who claim to live in a working-class habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Class, becomes, following Schutz (1972), a way of making sense of everyday life, or as Fussell (1983) suggests, class becomes defined by perceived status and culture. In rugby league, there is a strong imperative from the symbolic boundaries and invented traditions to identify with a working class, hence the claim that rugby league is a working-class game. On the surface this claim is problematic - there are fans who would define themselves as middle class, there are working-class people at Netherborough, Netherborough shares some of the ideas about northern-ness, rugby league is a capitalist business, football also claims to be a working-class game - but when understood as a symbol it makes sense. The 'class-ness' of the imaginary community gives both traditionalists and expansionists another way of justifying their positions: it also supports my contention that what is at stake is a tension over the interpretation of symbols and meaning, following the epistemological ideas of Latour (1988), the later writing of Wittgenstein (1968) and the primacy of rhetoric theorised by Stanley Fish (1994).

So both codes use historical discourses and cultural icons to define belonging and exclusion through imaginary communities. And it is in the symbolic boundaries and mutual knowledge of these imaginary communities, as well as the specific imaginary communities, that the two codes differ. I suggest that these differences are so real for the people inside the imaginary communities, and that the boundaries are so normalised, that any attempt to merge the two codes would result in an uproar similar to that over the Super League from both communities. While this would not stop any merger, it may result in the formation of a merged code at the elite, commercial level, and the retention of the two codes at a lower level. In brief, rugby league is perceived by the people inside it as working class, and in this country is inextricably associated with the north of England. This connection is supported by imagining at the local level, where my respondents believed belonging to 'Sudthorpe' was only attainable by supporting rugby league, a belief unsustainable in front of people who actually live there, but a belief important in normalising a myth of belonging. As I have shown in Chapter Eight, 'the game' of rugby union in this country is defined by completely different myths: those of the gentleman amateur, of the spirit of fair play, or as Michael Green puts it, the belief in the Union Jack flying over every scrum (Green, 1960:1995, p. 27). Both imaginary communities cross borders into other countries, and here the differences are exacerbated. League is the national game of Papua New Guinea, it is a commercial sport supported by blue collar white Australians, and it is seen as the 'Polynesian' game in the cities of New Zealand. Rugby union is worldwide, is associated with white populations in colonial countries, with elites in Argentina and Japan, and is popular among universities and armies in smaller countries. Co-opting Kuhnian language, and hence making another connection between the imaginary community and the thought collective described by Kuhn's predecessor Ludwig Fleck (1935:1979), it is clear to me that

the imaginary community acts as a social paradigm: hence 'the game' of rugby league and 'the game' of rugby union are incommensurable. To merge the codes, therefore, a new paradigm, a new process of (re)invention and imagining, is necessary. Already, in rugby union, this is underway, with the commercial package created with the Super-12 series in the Southern Hemisphere, and the rush to professionalise. It is suspected by many in 'the game' of rugby league that the Super League is also part of this project to create new myths which a merged game can identify with (Clayton *et al.*, 1995a; Kelner, 1996).

Neither game exists by itself: rugby league, rugby union, and the people involved in them are only sites that exist in larger, contested networks of power and control. I am not suggesting that either imaginary community is isolated from issues of identity surrounding place or nation, or any other social issue. Obviously the people inside the imaginary communities also go to work, have families and homes, watch television, have other interests and have all the attendant highs and lows of life. No doubt many will belong to a number of imaginary communities, as leisure supposedly becomes a matter of choosing various commodified options available to us in a decentred, postmodern culture (Rojek, 1995). This relationship with the wider society, however, is explicit in a number of ways in this thesis. I have shown that the imaginary communities are places of belonging and exclusion: they exert a social power over who is inside and who is outside. Following Foucault (1980), it can be argued that the imaginary communities act as interstices of power, with their own discourses of control. Hence one can be a powerful official within a club with a high degree of control over the imaginary community, but be powerless in the wider socio-political processes. The imaginary communities become a way of negotiating power, and if they become sufficiently stable they can act, as in the case of 'the game' of rugby union, as part of the Establishment with a powerful voice. Where the imaginary

community stands in relation to the established, dominant culture of society, is as fluid as the definition of that dominant culture. Postmodern theorists suggest that there is no dominant culture. In terms of leisure, Rojek (1995) also claims that any kind of power analysis has been discarded and we are all at liberty to enjoy any number of postmodern leisure pursuits. Here I have to disagree. It is clear that there is an unequal power relationship in society, and this implies that access to choice is limited by lack of power. Hence there is a dominant culture, even if what that entails is continually contested (Williams, 1977). What I will attempt to answer is the role of these sports in the issue of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971; Gruneau, 1983; Hargreaves, 1986; Hargreaves and Tomlinson, 1992).

In Chapter Two I raised the question of whether sport was good for us by discussing Huizinga's ideal of play, and Adorno's grim pessimism of sport as a way of controlling the masses. From the field it is evident that both have some veracity. People do enjoy sport, and find in playing, watching and administrating a sense of identity and belonging. In this respect, sport is a good thing. Yet at the same time sport is big business, and supporters are treated as consumers to be cynically manipulated into buying merchandise. In defining belonging, these imaginary communities have also defined those who do not belong, and have therefore supported and maintained patterns of discrimination such as homophobia, sexism and racism. In Chapter Seven I showed that the real concern over masculinity was not the growth and competition of opposing masculinities, but the expression of the hegemonic masculinity of the Western patriarchal capitalist system (Hearn, 1987).

Throughout the thesis I have emphasised the role of constructing meaning, and the tension this creates. As Stanley Fish (1994) argues, the only certainty in the world is that people will argue rhetorically from their point of view, and argue for their own purposes.

Hence in 'the game' of rugby league, one sees expansionists and traditionalists contesting the construction of meaning, the construction of a world defined by symbolic boundaries. In doing so, they are attempting to make their interpretation of meaning the only one available - when this occurs, one sees the normalisation of these interpretations into 'facts' or 'truths' which are self-evident for the people in 'the game'. Fish describes this as a "strategy... [to] detach your agenda from its partisan origins... and then present it as a universal imperative... so perspicuous only the irrational... could refute it" (1994: p. 8).

What is happening is that there is a struggle over meaning that can be described in terms of hegemony. Although the obvious application of hegemony to this thesis would be to look at the class situation of rugby league and rugby union, what has been produced from the synthesis is an idea of hegemony through a contest of meaning. Rugby league is perceived as a working-class game, and rugby union does seem to be associated with the Establishment, and there is certainly some kind of hegemony being asserted (Hargreaves, 1986) or contested (Gruneau, 1983). However, Morgan argues that

'If hegemony theory is to redeem itself as a theory of social transformation and to purge itself of its surviving reductionist tendencies... [theorists have] to take seriously the notion that there might well be important specificities and distinctions of cultural practices, understood in some semiotic or other sense, that are constitutive of their social being and, therefore, indispensable to our critical reckoning of them.' (Morgan, 1994: p. 327)

That is, hegemony as a concept can be understood both culturally and symbolically - one can have hegemonic meaning, hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic practice, as well as hegemony produced by socio-economic structures. This hegemony, as Williams states, while "by definition... is always dominant,... is never total or exclusive" (Williams, 1977: p.

113). Hence hegemony becomes something that is contested, and hence one can see how it becomes a useful analytical tool in exploring the relationship between the imaginary communities and other social structures.

I have described how both rugby league and rugby union are important in the production and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, a way of being a man that has been culturally defined through its hegemony historically over residual and emergent masculinities. This hegemonic masculinity has defined a particular gender order (Connell, 1987), and hence this gender order is created inside the imaginary communities. In this sense, rugby league and rugby union serve as important sites for the defence of hegemonic masculinity even though both games seem to be in conflict in an economic and cultural sense. However, there is a hegemonic struggle over how this masculinity is expressed: these expressions have contested versions that relate to localised and globalised discourses.

Inside rugby league the contest between the expansionists and the traditionalists is a contest to exert hegemony over 'the game'. What one has is a popularised, localised working-class game being recast in a globalised, commercialised form. Hence when I have discussed "what the game means" what this has implied is a hegemonic struggle over the heart and soul of the imaginary community. This struggle over hegemony is also apparent, between the amateur pastime and the commercialised form, in rugby union. As Williams (1977) suggests, hegemony is never total: hence, the debate over interpreting invented traditions, symbolic boundaries and expressions of hegemonic masculinity have been possible.

What this application of dominant but not total hegemony means is a more flexible interpretation of the structure-agency divide. Just as structures are not binding, so agency is limited by the meanings created by those structures. We are social beings who use

structures as tools to understand our everyday life, but we also have the capacity to change meanings through discussion, debate and action. Giddens (1984) suggests that the social is created through a similar process of interaction between structure and agency that creates a structuration, a fluid set of meanings and rules which can be acted upon by humans. Following this, one can see that rugby league and rugby union become sites where hegemonic meaning is contested and continually (re)applied. Hence, although rugby league produces hegemonic masculinity, and is caught in a hegemonic struggle between exclusionist local discourses and capitalist global discourses, it cannot be given a simple value judgement. It cannot be described as a good or bad thing in its entirety: the rhetorical nature of meaning that Fish (1994) proposes allows for any interpretation to join the contest for hegemony. As Cec Thompson writes,

'As the reader must know only too well by now, I am always reflecting on the extent to which the game of Rugby League has fashioned my life... My achievements - such as they are - owe so much to the game that its continuing popularity as a spectator sport means a lot to me.' (Thompson, 1995: p. 187)

For Thompson, rugby league is - in the final analysis - a redeeming sport.

This thesis has developed a number of themes that relate to rugby league and rugby union. I have shown that both of these sports give rise to a 'fictive ethnicity' (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1988), a group defined by perceived class, local and regional affiliations that belong to different levels of an imaginary community (Cohen, 1985). This community has a contingent relationship with localised ideas of community, that have been imagined (Anderson, 1983). Through invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) and present centred historical discourses (Wilson and Ashplant, 1988b) this community has itself been

imagined, though the events that become cultural icons may not be invented, merely chosen (Jarvie, 1993). In creating the imaginary community symbolic boundaries are formed from shared interpretations of meaning (Wittgenstein, 1968), through invented tradition, and through perceived cultural icons and qualities. Hence rugby league is seen as working-class, as northern, and in doing so it is defined as white through a process of placing boundaries against the Other (Opatow, 1990). The imaginary community also serves as a producer and keeper of hegemonic masculinity, and expressions of that hegemonic masculinity (Hearn, 1987). In doing so, it maintains a gender order (Connell, 1987) that situates hegemonic masculinity and men who identify themselves in it in a dominant position.

It can be seen that the research has produced an original thesis. I have shown that the subject of the case study combined with the qualitative methodology is original. The relationship between the case study and the sociology of sport positions it as a new piece of research in the field. Also, it is clear that my epistemological basis and the synthesis of my theoretical framework is as innovative as I claimed in the opening chapter.

I have come to the end of my thesis. I have shown the relationships I intended to explore, and have answered the research questions about the nature of the imaginary community and the sense of belonging. But there is a final question: the one of my opinion about the value of these games. Aside from the fact that any judgement is open to criticism, I can only argue that, given the points raised in this thesis, that the issue is a complex one. I do not support the way rugby league and rugby union support the hegemonic masculinity, and I do not like the exclusion that comes with belonging. However, if I reserve judgement on rugby league and rugby union, it is because the nature of their relationship with struggles over hegemony makes the future uncertain.

Appendices

Appendix One

A brief overview of the games of rugby

One of the main themes of this thesis is the role of the present in creating history, and historical discourses, for the purpose of creating identity, maintaining ideology and justifying patterns of belonging and exclusion. To even begin discussing the origins of rugby league and rugby union may appear to contradict everything I have said in the main body of the thesis. Hence this introduction to the codes, which is aimed at those not familiar with the bifurcation of rugby, aims to be as simple as possible, avoiding controversy and interpretation of the main sources, while being aware of the historiographical pitfalls of relying on those sources (Wilson and Ashplant, 1988b). Luckily, the relationship between the two codes, and in particular the Split, is a topic covered by a number of commentators from different angles: figurationism (Dunning and Sheard, 1979), economics (Davies, 1988), rugby union (Jones, 1994), rugby league (Delaney, 1984, 1993), pseudo-Marxism (Latham and Mather, 1993) and nostalgic traditionalism (Moorhouse, 1989, 1995). Also, the research of Tony Collins (1993, 1995, 1996) has explored the origins of rugby and the Split within the framework of a PhD research process and has developed new ideas on the early history of 'rugby', though following Skinner (1969) one must add the caveat that Collins was a prominent member of the Rugby League Supporters' Association and what I have termed an expansionist. In addition, there are historical accounts written by historians within both imaginary communities, such as the work by Robert Gate (1989), and those that connect rugby with the other footballing code in an attempt to explore the development of all three codes (G. Williams, 1994). All these secondary sources should be read.

Rugby, then, was a codified version of football developed in the school of that name in the early to mid Nineteenth Century in England (Dunning and Sheard, 1979; Chandler, 1996). As a public school, Rugby was one of a number of schools that had adopted and adapted the older, disordered game of football from the masses in the light of the Muscular Christian movement (Mason, 1981). As the games became more organised some schools adopted the rules of others, so that inter school matches could be played. In addition, the universities, where old boys from different schools found themselves alongside each other, codified combined rules. Finally, old boys organised matches between themselves and set up clubs to play each other.

These developments forced the relative homogenisation of football (Dunning and Sheard, 1979; G. Williams, 1994), though the exact nature of this movement, and why it happened, is debatable. When a Football Association was formed to organise the disparate clubs and fix a set of rules for the games, a number of the Rugby influenced clubs refused to join over a dispute over what rules 'football' would be played by. Eventually, in 1871, these Rugby influenced clubs agreed on their own set of rules, and formed a Rugby Football Union to govern their own version of football: 'rugby'.

Some time after the codification of association football (or 'soccer') and rugby football changes in employment patterns, social reform movements and Muscular Christianity all combined to give the working class time to pursue sporting activities (Cunningham, 1980). Both codes of football were taken up by working-class men, in particular soccer (Mason, 1981). Rugby, in the late 1870s and early 1880s, became popular in the urban areas of the West Riding and Southern Lancashire, where new clubs were formed with open membership: that is, working-class men could join these clubs (Collins,

1993; G. Williams, 1994). By the 1890s a pattern had emerged whereby rugby was played in the south of England by a predominantly middle class, and in Wales and the urban areas of Yorkshire and Southern Lancashire by a predominantly working class (Russell, 1988). Soccer, on the other hand, was played by the working class in the south, in the Midlands, and in Scotland. It was also very popular in Liverpool and other parts of Lancashire (Russell, 1988). Of course, this is a generalisation, but the trend was noticeable (G. Williams, 1994). Soccer had also accepted professionalism and a professional league (Mason, 1981).

The popularity of rugby among the workers of the West Riding was partly due to the cup competition organised by the Yorkshire Rugby Union, which mimicked the successful soccer FA Cup that drew large crowds. Rugby in the West Riding became a spectacle, with clubs taking gate money and players becoming local heroes. 'Shamateurism' was claimed to be rife, with the rules of amateurism being reputedly bent by the large clubs of the West Riding, and those of Lancashire (Dunning and Sheard, 1979; Collins, 1995). Throughout the early 1890s moves were made to stop these practices, and at the same time the large clubs attempted to form their own league and legalise payment for broken-time.

The end result was the Split of 1895 (Chapter Eight), when the large northern clubs formed their own union, the Northern Union. Other, smaller clubs in the north joined them, and Graham Williams (1994) claims the large rugby clubs of the Midlands almost joined the Northern Union as well. The NU allowed payment of broken-time, but kept other rules that outlawed professionalism. However, over a period of ten years these rules were relaxed, and the Northern Union also changed the rules to make the game more appealing to spectators: reducing the number in a team from fifteen to thirteen, abolishing the line out, and introducing the play the ball instead of the rucks and mauls of the RFU code.

With the removal of the northern clubs, and the increasing professionalism of soccer, the RFU's version of rugby was forced to realign itself as an amateur, middle class pursuit in England, and the public schools adopted it in favour of soccer. Having already made a connection with the Establishment, rugby had been spread through the Empire via university graduates, the military and the civil service. Now with its entrenchment this network allowed the game to spread even further. It became a popular game among the white populations of the colonies, in particular South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Rugby union was also taken through its relationship with the Establishment to other parts of the world.

The Northern Union struggled from its birth to attract support in new areas, though it tried constantly to create clubs and leagues in other areas (Farrar and Lush, 1995). Soccer was a threat to its popularity in the north (Russell, 1988; G. Williams, 1994), and many of the small amateur clubs that had joined it folded or returned to the Rugby Football Union. However, the large clubs were established enough to continue drawing a core support from the working class, and the game made enough impression for members of the visiting All Blacks to notice it. When these New Zealanders returned to their country they disseminated word of this different code of rugby, and a Northern Union team, the 'All Golds', was established to tour England in 1907. Their establishment coincided with dissent in Australian rugby union over broken-time and control of the union, and a New South Wales Rugby League was established to play in 1908. By a vote it was decided the new league would adopt the Northern Union rules, which the All Golds had disseminated, and in 1908 the first Australian NU side toured England.

With the Northern Union stabilised by this competition and other debatable factors, rugby league's cultural, social and spatial networks were stabilised around parts of the north

of England. In Australia, however, the game was bolstered by the signing of the entire team of 1908's Wallabies, and the cities and country areas of New South Wales and Queensland took up the game, which was now called rugby league. The decision by the NSWRL to continue its competition in the 1914-1918 War while the NSWRFU stopped playing was probably a decisive moment that gave rugby league a dominance in New South Wales that it still holds (Lester, 1988; Phillips, 1996).

By the 1920s rugby union had a new generation of school trained enthusiasts ready to start new clubs, and the game started to strengthen in this country, while still retaining rules on amateurism. The Northern Union had changed its rugby's name to rugby league. Both codes made minor rule changes, but a general relationship had emerged. Union was nationwide, 'amateur' and middle class, whereas rugby league was confined to parts of the north of England, working class, and perceived as professional, even though amateur leagues existed. Union was the game of the Army, of the Schools, of the Establishment, and a culture of exclusivity emerged whereby league was shunned as a stereotyped Other (Opotow, 1990).

However, union was also building up a large spectator base in various areas, and in particular the International matches began attracted immense interest. The commercial factors in sport and the Western world gave rise to 'shamateurism' and increased professionalisation (Dunning and Sheard, 1979). An unofficial merit table emerged that spoke of status and was biased towards the old London clubs, and which did not reflect the wide support some of the Midlands clubs had (Dunning and Sheard, 1979; Jones, 1994). By the end of the 1970s a cup competition had been established, and finally in the mid-eighties a league, the Courage League, was established, which quickly altered the pecking order in

English rugby: unfashionable clubs like Leicester and Bath came to dominate, whereas clubs like London Welsh and Blackheath slipped down the league.

This was the situation and relationship between the two codes at the time I started this thesis. Union had professionalised, but was still supposedly amateur. League was still stuck in the north of England, and although the amateur organisation (BARLA, formed in 1973) had rescued grassroots league from neglect, it was struggling to survive as a professional sport in a commercial world, at least in this country. By the time I had finished this thesis rugby union had allowed professionalism, seen itself troubled by potential splits, and entered the world of sport as business with large sums of money being channelled into clubs. League had gone through a number of crises, had seen a report (Lindsay, 1994) condemning its lack of vision, and the professional side had been part of a Rupert Murdoch inspired plan to create a Super League across the world. These processes, which have seen Bath play Wigan at league, Wigan pay Bath at union, and Wigan take part (and win) in the union sevens at Twickenham, have made the world of 'rugby' a different place, and already my thesis is, in a sense, a part of history.

Appendix Two

List and description of respondents

Due to ethical considerations, I have not given the real names of my respondents, only the following descriptions. Coupled with the use of pseudonyms for the clubs and the localities, this provides a safeguard for their real identities. Where respondents were interviewed on tape I have marked them with a 'T'. Where respondents have been given pseudonyms in the text I have mentioned it alongside the description. Also note that, in addition to these respondents, other material was gathered during the ethnography.

The structure of the list has no significance, merely one that reflects the order in which I collated the list from my notes. Finally, all respondents are white males unless stated otherwise.

Netherborough/rugby union

1. Club member, committee official, forward thinking, owns a business (T)
2. Club member, ex-player, ex-League player (T)
3. Committee member, chairman, ex-player at social level (T)
4. Female member, coaching assistant, member of Ladies Committee
5. Club supporter, historian, retired
6. Coaching assistant, ex-player, policeman (T)
7. Director of rugby, development officer, player
8. Club supporter, local born, non-Member
9. Retired supporter, Honorary Member
10. Journeyman forward, veteran, non-first team

11. Club captain, back, well-off, veteran (T)
12. First team pack player, County level: Rob (T)
13. Young star, league fan, chased by bigger clubs: Jason (T)
14. Ex-President of the RFU (T)
15. Ex-player, County Union member (T)

Sudthorpe/Rugby League

16. Female amateur player, dedicated (T)
17. Female amateur player, young (T)
18. Female referee, ex-player: Mary Smith (T)
19. Boys' Club member, Sudthorpe fan, expansionist
20. Boys' Club management, fan, Chief Executive
21. RL journalist, ex-player of both codes (T)
22. RFL administrator
23. RLSA member
24. Historian, traditionalist, pessimist
25. Sudthorpe director
26. Australian RL supporter
27. Maurice Oldroyd, BARLA (T)
28. Maurice Lindsay, RFL (T)
29. Under-14 player
30. Under-16 player, dedicated to training
31. Under-18 player, Academy level, attracting scouts
32. Supporter, drinker, fund raiser, Boys' Club member: Graham
33. Coaching assistant at Boys' Club

34. Supporter, drinker, friend of Graham
35. Sudthorpe player, fringer squad member, black
36. Old man, ex-secretary of Sudthorpe: Bill Brown (T)
37. Fanatical supporter, attends all matches (T)
38. Ex-amateur, supporter, journalist (T)
39. Sudthorpe player, local born
40. Sudthorpe player, young professional
41. Sudthorpe honorary member, ex-player, involved in amateur scene
42. Sudthorpe club secretary
43. Sudthorpe first team coach, expansionist (T)
44. Supporter, historian, helper, traditionalist (T)
45. Supporter, amateur player, expansionist
46. Ex-Sudthorpe player, successful professional (T)
47. Ex-player, black, retired (T)
48. Retired committee member, amateur organiser (T)
49. Chemicals committee member
50. Founder of Chemicals, very old man (T)
51. Chemicals coaching assistant
52. Amateur supporter, friend of players, traditionalist
53. Ex-professional amateur player
54. Amateur supporter, ex-Chemicals player, Boys' Club coach: Mark O'Reilley
55. Ex-Chemicals player, injured, Sudthorpe fan: Jimmy Cross (T)
56. Chemicals supporter, helper
57. Chemicals player, young, fitness fanatic

58. Chemicals coach, ex-professional, expansionist (T)
59. Amateur coach/player, ex-Sudthorpe professional, black: Neville Livingstone (T)

Appendix Three

The match report: Bram-busters!

For this particular match I was instructed to file a copy of 350 words, and that copy had to be phoned in within thirty minutes of the end of the match. Hence I had to be certain of structure and wording within the remit of what was required by the paper. This is a copy of the report that was printed the morning after on page 16 of the Rugby Leaguer (1909, 30 January 1995).

This was a match spoilt by the heavy conditions and the rather lazy interpretation of the play the ball directive.

Yet the catalogue of errors and the mud bath in the middle of the pitch should not deflect from a sterling second half performance by Bramley, who had effectively won the match around the hour mark when man of the match Wayne Freeman crossed the line twice in three minutes.

Swinton were a shadow of the side that beat Leigh in mid week. Although the younger Tony Barrow put in a hard stint at prop, there was a lack of cohesion between the forwards and the backs. When Brett Clark had to limp from the field at half time their creativity was stifled, and they had nothing to hold up against the homeside's tactical genius Ray Ashton and exciting scrum half Gordon Long.

It was the Lions who scored first in the opening minutes when lively hooker Paul Gartland finished a move involving loose forward Paul Barrow and centre David Marsh, which caught the home defence napping. For the next fifteen minutes it was all blue and white as ex-saints Ian Connor and Tony Barrow Junior pounded the villagers (sic) line.

But that line held firm and the mistakes creeped in. When Bramley finally got round to attacking after a Swinton knock on, Gordon Long managed to sneak a try from dummy half.

With both sides deadlocked, Ray Ashton and Dean Hall came on to turn the game in Bramleys (sic) favour.

Hall, back from suspension, caused havoc in mid-field and Ashton changed the pattern of the home sides (sic) play. Before the interval loose forward Paul Garrett had found a gap and Barry Greenwood capitalised to go in for Bramley's second.

In the second half, the game threatened to degenerate when tempers started to boil resulting in the sin-binning of Swinton prop Ian Connor.

Bramley kept their cool throughout this and Wayne Freeman copied team mate Long in scoring from Dummy (sic) half, before running sixty yards three minutes later to score his second and kill the Lions (sic) hopes. Dean Creasser then went over after Gordon Long chipped through, before Connor finally returned.

Ian Wigglesworth could have grabbed a number (sic) for the home side but for a double movement, and Paul Lords (sic) try on full time for the Lions only contributed to a flattering haul for the visitors.

Match Stats

Full-time: 30-10

Bramley: Wigglesworth 6, Greenwood 7, Bell 7, Sharp 7, W. Freeman 8, Creasser 7, Long 8, Quinlan 7, Blankley 7, Agar 7, G. Freeman 7, Jewitt 7, Garrett 7, Ashton 7, Hall 8
Swinton: Hudspith 6, Ashcroft 6, Marsh 7, Welsby 6, Lord 5, Clark 6, Kay 6, Connor 7, Gartland 8, T. Barrow 8, Chrimes 6, Humphries 7, P. Barrow 7, Whittle 6, Earner (dnp)

Half-time: 12-6

Weather: Cold

Referee: P. Gilmour

Match rating: 2 (out of 5)

Man of the match: Wayne Freeman

Attendance: 647

The editorial changes made to my original copy were minor ones of structure, emphasising the top of the piece about the conditions and refereeing, but juxtaposing them in a strong way against my rejoinder, where I go on to say something positive about the match. A mixed metaphor referring to the tension (I had used “flying tempers”) was replaced. Finally, my criticism of the referee was changed to suggest his role was more passive due to lazy interpretations, and not any active fault of his role as a referee.

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